

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN EUROPE – A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT:

With growing Muslim population in Europe and recent influx of migrants, it is vital to analyze schooling options available to Muslim parents in terms of Islamic studies in public and private sector. This research will accordingly help Muslim community and governments to plan their way forward in a number of ways such as teacher training, curriculum design, operating private schools and other aspects. In current study, we have analyzed a large body of academic research, news and opinions of various community members. Our findings from this explorative research identify a number of difference from country to country. Some countries consider confessional education where-as other provide it in a non-confessional manner. Some have complete separation between Church and state whereas others are heavily influenced by Church and accordingly reflect this in their educational policies. We also find out that financial situation of Muslim communities is generally not very strong and they are reliant on foreign funding to meet their basic religious needs e.g. having a place of worship or a mosque. Most of this support is found to be coming from Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Our findings also highlight the importance of Sunday or weekend schools as most of the communities where adequate confessional Islamic knowledge is not available through public education system and Islamic schools cannot be established, they are helping the communities in imparting religious knowledge they consider important for their children.

Keywords: *Islamic school, Religious studies, Religion in Schools, Islamic education, Islamic Studies*

INTRODUCTION

Muslim population in Europe is gradually increasing (2% between 1990 to 2010).According to predicted figures for 2050, Christianity is expected to maintain its biggest religious following in Europe (65.%), however, Muslim population is expected to almost double and reach 10.2% (Hackett, 2015). With increasing Muslim population, we can expect increased percentage of parents looking forward for religious education of their children. It is therefore important to have fresh look at Islamic education options

available to Muslim parents in Europe and analyze them from the point of view of relevant government policies.

In this paper, we have referred to previous research, news and opinions of community members to interpret and analyze European education system from the point of religious education, in particular, Islamic studies.

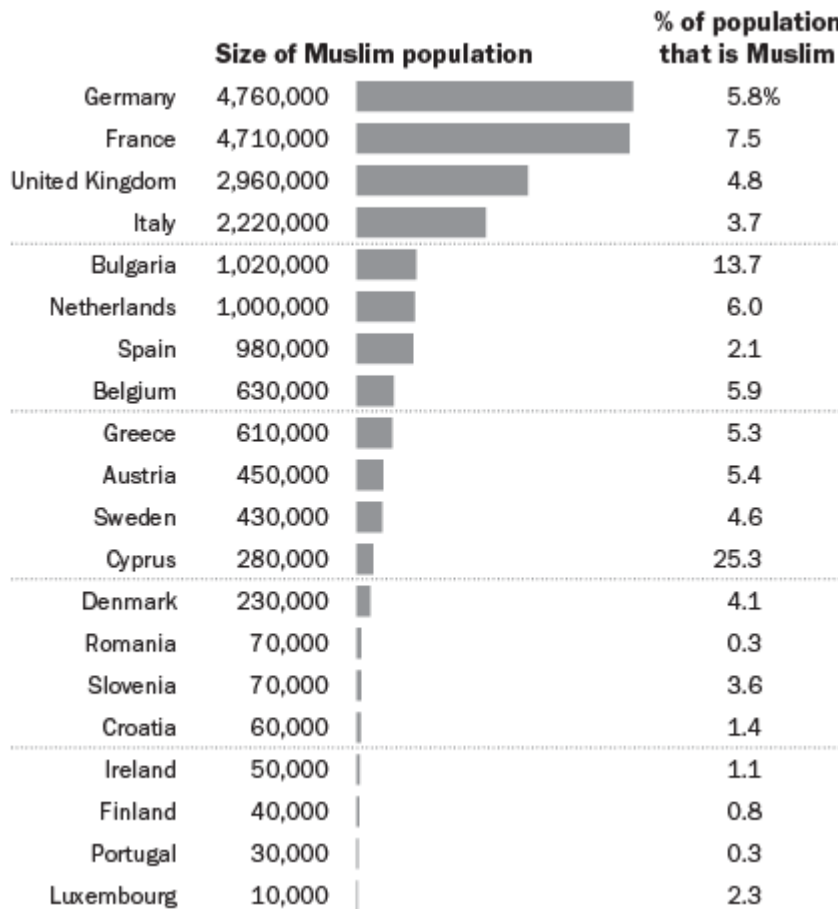


Figure 1: Muslim Population in Europe

Source: PEW Templeton Global Religious Future Project

(Hackett, 2015)

Projection regarding religious following show an increase in Islamic population and unaffiliated:

	2010 ESTIMATED POPULATION	% IN 2010	2050 PROJECTED POPULATION	% IN 2050
Christians	553,280,000	74.5%	454,090,000	65.2%
Unaffiliated	139,890,000	18.8	162,320,000	23.3
Muslims	43,470,000	5.9	70,870,000	10.2
Jews	1,420,000	0.2	1,200,000	0.2
Hindus	1,380,000	0.2	2,660,000	0.4
Buddhists	1,350,000	0.2	2,490,000	0.4
Other Religions	890,000	0.1	1,100,000	0.2
Folk Religions	870,000	0.1	1,590,000	0.2
Regional total	742,550,000	100.0	696,330,000	100.0

Table 1: Projection about size of religious groups in Europe

(Masci, 2015)

With these changing demographics and specific educational policies adopted by countries regarding religious education and values being taught to pupils at schools, standardized education programs in Islam are being considered across nearly all of Europe in various shapes and forms.

This requirement is currently being addressed through policies that reflect the unique political and cultural contexts currently surrounding Islam in each nation.

While some countries make room for state-regulated Islamic programs alongside Christian, Catholic, and other religious education programs in public school settings, others opt instead to support private Islamic institutions in varying political and financial capacities. On the other hand there are some states which keep religion and state completely separate.

In addition to requirements and policies surrounding curricula, many EU states have specific requirements with regards to teachers' qualification. Islamic education and Arabic language teaching, accordingly, are no exclusion and teachers are required to hold qualifications in line with state requirements..

Therefore, university programs for training of imams and Islamic teachers have also become necessary to support country specific policy requirements. The diverse policies and levels of political and public support for Islamic education and Imam training programs have resulted in varying degrees of effectively meeting this need.

RESEARCH BENEFITS:

- Findings from this report can become a tool for **strategizing future schooling options** for Muslim children and allow governments, parents, Muslim organizations and communities to do comparative analysis and plan for their future goals. It may particularly be useful for private Islamic schools that operate internationally or plan to expand internationally.
- EU governments, with this report and other studies similar to this, can benchmark their policies against each other and accordingly plan the way forward on their religious education policies.
- Examining each individual country's approach to Islamic education in Europe is an important dimension of case-by-case integration analyses. Looking at Islamic education as a transversal issue can also open broader discussions around the identity transformations experienced by both Muslims and secular host societies as a result of the Western-Islamic encounter.
- When we analyze previous researches on this topic, we identify that they are either written for a specific country or for a selected number of countries and hence, do not provide a holistic view of status of Islamic Education in Europe. Most of such research is focused on religious education in general and not specifically Islamic education. Some researchers have tried to compile articles and papers on Islamic education in Europe. Though it compiles into a highly beneficial resource, cohesion between these individual pieces remains an area for improvement. Our current research is an effort to bridge this gap and present a well-integrated, cohesive and holistic picture of Islamic educational opportunities in Europe in line with relevant educational policies.

METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION:

- Previous research, news reports and secondary data collection of community opinions is done to explore current situation

- Countries with higher Muslim percentages are discussed first. We see quite a variation in presence of Muslims across Europe which heavily influences the education policies relating to Islamic studies and choices available to Muslim parent.
- Religious education option in public schools has been discussed as most Muslim children attend public schools.
- We have also discussed private Islamic educational institutions, which operate due to a number of reasons such as unavailability of Islamic education in schools or not being enough, availability or unavailability of financing options, provision by Government to allow Islamic schools etc. These factors generally link to the level of public and political support provided for Islam in public school systems and legislative provisions. Where they exist, the accessibility of government funding, state regulation of curriculums, curriculum content, and the official value of diplomas and degrees has been reviewed in line with available information.

LIMITATIONS

- Educational policies in European countries are changing rapidly. While researching relevant policy and gathering information for this book, we came across a number of proposed changes in pipelines with some being planned for implementation in near future. For some countries, information will be required to be updated in a revision of this book.
- In some countries, policy and constitution allows certain provisions which are not tested or implemented as yet due to lack of demand. When it comes to practical implementation, adherence to constitution and its interpretation may vary from country to country.

FINDINGS SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS SUMMARY

- Pre-dominant religion in Europe is Christianity which also impacts educational system. Often states have official churches or church affiliations which strongly impact their educational policy. However, there is an increasing secularization in many countries.
- Islamic Schools can be opened in almost all European countries studied under our research barring Northern Cyprus and Slovakia. In Slovakia it is due to the fact that

Muslims are not registered as a community. It should be noted that in some countries, there are certain conditions and specific requirements from state that need to be fulfilled in order to run Islamic schools. Whereas in others, religious organizations are given free hand in terms of religious teaching in Islamic schools.

- Islamic Education can be taught public schools in almost half the countries. However, there are mixed opinions among Muslim parents about its effectiveness.
- Religion in some shape or form, either as a separate subject or as a part of broader history of ethics course, is taught in almost all countries except Hungary. One of the common forms of teaching is non-confessional subject in religion which discusses various faiths. This type of approach can be a 'make' or 'break' situation for adherence to faith as pointed out by Atheist scientist and cosmologist Lawrence Krauss while discussing teaching of religion in schools "Change is always one generation away... so if we can plant the seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away. And that's what I think we have an obligation to do". He further continued "What we need to do is present comparative religion as a bunch of interesting historical anecdotes, and show the silly reasons why they did what they did" (Haq, 2014; Brown, 2014; DOLAN, 2014).
- In most countries, religious education is offered as an optional subject. Many of the countries which have it as a mandatory subject allow a non-confessional generic subject on Ethics to be selected.
- Generally governments work with religious organizations in delivery of religious instruction and in many cases they can also appoint teachers.
- Different governments have different requirements regarding who can teach in schools. Relevant teaching qualifications are generally required.

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
Germany	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Varies from state to state	Varies from state to state	Yes	Yes
France	Only in secondary schools (however no Muslim chaplains are known to conduct such classes)	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non- confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
United Kingdom	Yes	No	Non-confessional	No (RE is mandatory)	Yes	Yes	Only supplementary education institutes (e.g. weekend and Sunday school)
Italy	Yes	No	Confessional	Yes (General Mythology or secular e.g. Music etc.)	Yes	Yes	No
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	Non-confessional (Various religions are taught though	Options available in secondary schools (e.g. 'Philosophy',	Yes	Yes	No (Dependence is heavily on foreign funding e.g. DIYANET of

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
			one faith may be dominant in teaching)	'World Religions' etc.)			Turkey)
Netherlands	Yes (On request from parents)	Yes	Non-confessional (General focus is world religions)	No (as religion is not a mandatory subject)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spain	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Alternate study activities OR a course on history of religions.	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Belgium	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greece	Yes	Yes (Government Established minority schools in line with international agreement)	Confessional	Yes (Pupils can opt out of Greek Orthodox education in public schools)	Yes (i.e. choice of not sending pupils to Islamic schools)	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Sweden	Yes	No	Non-confessional	No	No	Yes	Yes
Cyprus (Northern)	Yes	Yes (only in primary schools)	Partly Confessional in primary; Non-confessional in secondary	Yes	Yes	No (religious education cannot be provided by anyone other than state - including after-school or informal classes)	N/A
Switzerland	Yes (In some canton, RE is not taught)	Yes (variation from canton to canton –	Confessional as well as non-confessional (canton to		Yes (variation from canton to canton – in some, it is	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
		Limited availability)	canton variation)		mandatory)		
Denmark	Yes	No	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	Yes	No	Non-Confessional	Part of course on RE (No separate course)	Yes (but very limited and partial)	Yes	Yes
Romania	Yes	Yes (Registered religious organizations	Confessional	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
		can deliver, including Muslims)					
Slovenia	Yes	No	Non-confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Croatia	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non- confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
Ireland	Yes	Yes (limited availability; 90% of schools are catholic leaving limited choice for parents)	Confessional	Parents can send their children to non-dominion schools. However, only 41 out of approximately 3171 primary schools in the country are multi- denominational in ethos.	Yes	Yes (See section on Ireland: Public schools are privately run as per Irish education system)	Yes

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Finland	Yes	Yes	Non-Confessional	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Tax Exemptions depending on family income)
Luxembourg	Yes		Confessional	Generalized courses are required to be provided according to constitution	No	Yes	Yes

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Czech	Yes	No	Both (Read section on Czech for more details)	Offered as integrated curricula (mandatory subjects)	Yes (only for confessional RE which is an optional subject)	Yes	Yes
Estonia	Yes	No (No provisions in state curriculum)	Non- Confessional	No	Yes	Yes	
Slovakia	Yes	No (Muslims are not registered as recognized religious	Confessional	Yes	No	No (Muslims are not registered as recognized religious community)	No (only Church schools are subsidized)

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
		community)					
Poland	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes (Limited availability)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hungary	No (only space can be provided at public facilities under specific conditions)	Yes (but not as part of regular curriculum or through state funds)	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non- confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
Latvia	Yes	No	Non- confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Confessional (Offered only if specifically requested)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Iceland	Yes	No	Non- confessional (but highly tilted towards Christianity)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
Malta	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITY

From the data summarized in this section and further details in coming country-specific discussions, following recommendations may be of assistance to Muslim community in acquiring appropriate Islamic education for their children.

Development of future leaders:

- First and the foremost thing is development of capable leaders who can effectively lead and guide Muslims. We see lack of management skills, initiative and leadership in many communities depriving them of working effectively and remain divided in smaller sectarian or ethnic groups. Effective Muslim leaders for tomorrow will be able to break these sectarian and ethnic barriers and connect to bigger picture. Having a vision is critical. Without a clear vision, we will never be able to take right steps in right direction.
- In my opinion, it is not enough for these future leaders to be 'general' leaders. It would be highly recommended for them to have good thorough understanding of their faith so that they can defend their people for orientalist, missionary and Islamophobic attacks.

Staying Connected with Religion:

- When Muslims live in non-Muslim countries, there is a very high risk of getting disconnected from religion due to prevalent societal norms and general practices which they naturally want to follow in order to not look different. Due to this, some Muslims get distanced from authentic Islamic instruction and what they are left to hear is internet, media and 'word-of-mouth' tells them which may or may not be close to reality. This can be one of potential causes for many social issues such as drugs usage, radicalization, poor academic performance etc. We therefore recommend seriousness about religious education as it would not come by itself, we will need to make an effort to ensure a bright future of our coming generation as Muslims who can become role-models in societies they live.
- Our next generation is going to face a lot of criticism and see creation of doubts aimed at shaking religious affiliations. It is in line with one of the ahadith of our beloved master Muhammad ﷺ in which he is reported to have said: "There will come upon the people a time when holding onto the religion will be like holding onto hot coal." (Tirmidhi). In my opinion, in such an age and time, only those people would remain steadfast on religion who are intellectually and emotionally attached to it and can appropriately respond back to deception thrown out at ummah. Education has a key role to play in this and we need to ensure that we educate our children about such issues. There is no way our children won't be able to access articles, books, videos and other material denying existence of God or questioning the very fundamentals of our beliefs. If we do not explain and answer such things to our next generation, they can easily get deceived.

First Education begins at home:

- Though Islamic schools can be opened in many countries and religious education can be provided through public schools in numerous countries, there is no doubt that first, foremost and most effective Islamic education begins at home. In order to prepare for that, Muslim parents need to understand their religions more than what they understand today and be a role model for their children which they can proudly refer to in their communities.

Establishing good relationship with state and community:

- Muslim communities should seek to establish positive relationships with governments and seek opportunities to clarify any misunderstandings. We see a growing trend of Islamophobia across almost all of Europe irrespective of size of Muslim population fueled by right-wing extremist Islamophobes who stir the idea that Islam is going to take over their land (even in countries where Muslims are a few thousand in population of millions). This is mainly due to inhuman activities done internationally by some who call themselves Muslim and put Islamic symbols on their flags but adhere to none of the blessed teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ about being merciful to humanity.
- It is also observed that in numerous countries, Muslim migrants do not have adequate skills in knowledge. It not only hinders effective integration with society but also impact other aspects of their social life, such as lower performance in academics. Muslims should accordingly focus on language mastering in order to effectively establish relationship with broader community, serve as effective citizens and spread the noble word.

Working as an Ummah – Helping our brothers and sisters in need:

- Study reveals that in most of the countries researched while writing this book, Muslim organizations are in severe financial strife. There mosques and schools cannot open because they do not have enough finances. Though some countries do not allow foreign funding, many do. It therefore requires other well-established and financially stable governments and organizations to play their role and helping Muslim communities in need. We do see some of these efforts from Turkey and Saudi Arabia. However, there is an opportunity to do much more than what is currently happening.

Making Islamic Schools a role Model:

- In some places, we see Islamic schools being true role models and leading the community in terms of academic achievements and community services, but this trend is not prevalent across the board. There are many schools which are severely suffering due to lack of appropriate leadership, awareness about relevant legislation, lack of professionalism and other aspects. In some cases, unfortunately, some fraudulent people were able to make their way up and misuse the resources. If community doesn't realize importance of effectively manage ITS educational institutions, it may get too late. Many parents complain about these issues but do not do much about it themselves. We all need to understand our role and own our institutions. In most cases, these organizations serve as the only place where our children can learn about Islam.

Effective Review of Islamic Education Curriculum in Public/ State Schools:

- Islamic Education curricula, either provided in accordance with state approved syllabus, or community recommended curriculum, confessional or non-confessional, needs to be critically reviewed to ensure that it adds value to Muslim children's understanding of Islam. It is reported in many countries that though the education is non-confessional, education is still believe to be abundantly embedded with concepts of particular faiths which potentially serve as indoctrination for young minds.

Teacher Training:

- In many countries, there are some specific requirements regarding teacher training. Many Muslim communities could not start delivering Islamic education in schools despite legal provisions

due to lack of availability of state qualified teachers. Whereas in some cases, issues still come up regarding Islamic studies and Arabic teachers not holding relevant teaching qualifications. We should proactively deal with this issue and either work with existing institutions to get relevant programs being offered or build institutions that can produce us good future educators for our Ummah.

Online Education:

- Online education can be one of the sustainable future strategies to deliver Islamic instruction to communities which are not large enough in numbers to have Islamic schools in their localities or live in countries where Islamic schools are not permitted. We see some effort on that already in progress at school and higher education level, however, there is a need to make it more relevant and interesting for next high-tech generation. We need instructional and content design experts to develop engaging platforms which can deliver essential and advanced education on Islamic sciences from school levels all the way up to higher education degrees.

Supplementary Schools:

- Supplementary schools (evening/ weekend/ Sunday) have been operating in many European Muslim communities. However, there is a need to critically review their effectiveness from psychological perspective and re-conceptualize curricula and teaching philosophies. They should be made an interesting place where pupils should look forward to going rather than a disliked obligation made compulsory by parents. These schools should have an element of fun integrated in curricula to keep students engaged. Teachers should come out of their traditional military style disciplined approach and be approachable friends for their students. Focus should be on development of character and infusing a spirit of life-long learning.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN COUNTRIES WITH GREATER THAN 100,000 MUSLIM POPULATION

GERMANY:

There are around 700,000 school going Muslim children in Germany ("Islam in Germany," 2015).

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES:

Policies concerning religious education vary considerably throughout Germany. In general, German practice is to provide religious instruction in schools (DW TV, 2005).

The German constitution grants parents the right to have their children educated according to their own religious tradition. While maintaining a neutral posture toward religion, the state is nonetheless responsible for providing the space for the teaching of religion in a confessional manner. In other words, the provision of RE as a school subject is a shared undertaking that involves both the state and the religious communities, meaning that the state practically supports religious education in schools. Since the state itself is prohibited from interfering with religious matters, it must cooperate with officially recognized religious communities or those that are classified as public cooperation. (Berglund, 2015)

By law, any community with a sufficient number of students may take part in this program.

Although religious education at state schools is a constitutional right in Germany, it has been argued in public debate that these guarantees only apply to Christian religions, or “to the religions traditionally present within Western Europe, thus excluding Islam” (Robbers, 2000: 148). Roman Catholics and Protestants have conducted such classes (publicly funded) for decades, and Jews were given similar rights in 2003. Taught by church- or synagogue-appointed teachers with curricula certified by the state’s education ministries, religion classes are graded, but not mandatory. (Pommereau, 2010).

Students not taking religious education must take a replacement subject e.g. ethics or philosophy. (except in Bremen and Berlin)

In Nord-Rhein Westphalen (NRW) a replacement subject is only provided and compulsory in the senior cycle. There is no replacement subject in Hamburg as religious education in the state schools is very open until class 6. It is omitted in the 7th and 8th school year and is an optional subject from class nine.

NEED FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN GERMANY:

Fearing that students who are not involved in state-supervised religious courses may be exposed to extremism by listening to preachers who do not possess solid Islamic background, there has been some impetus for authorities to take action by initiating Islamic religious lessons at public schools.

“A sound knowledge of Islamic theology and philosophy and psychology, and strategies of discourse and discussion,” is the best antidote there is to extremism, Harry Harun Behr of Frankfurt University, told the Christian Science Monitor on Thursday, April 23. (“Islamic Education in Germany Fights Radical Islam,” 2015)

The courses are indeed meant to contribute to better understanding between kids with different backgrounds and religions. But Muslim organizations in Germany want more. For years they have been demanding that Islamic education be introduced to schools on a par with the Catholic and Protestant lessons -- that is instruction that's doesn't only inform kids about Islam, but communicates Muslim values and the Islamic faith (Passow, 2006).

It has traditionally been difficult for Muslims to establish religious instruction due to regional governments failing to recognize Islam as a religious community, as there is no consensus organization.

One of the obstacles to including Islam in school-taught religions, some say, is that it lacks an accepted entity to offer guidance. Germany’s Muslims are mostly Sunnis; the rest are mainly Shiites, Alevis, or followers of the south Asian Ahmaddiyya group. “There isn’t one Islam, and it’s not easy to reflect the different manifestations of Islam’s pluralism in a class on Islam,” says Jamal Malik, chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt (Pommereau, 2010).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

In 1980, the Islamic Federation petitioned Berlin school authorities to establish religious instruction in the city’s schools.

In addition to others filed in 1983 and 1987, it was rejected.

In March 1994, the Islamic Federation sued and won; Berlin's Administrative Appeal Court ruled in 1998 that the Islamic Federation must be recognized as a religious community under section 23(1) of the Berlin Schools Act, since a religious community is defined by a consensus about faith and belief, regardless of whether the religion is organized as a public corporation or a private society.

The court rejected the argument put forth by Berlin school authorities, which said that it could not deal with religions which were not organized or similar to public corporations.

The Federal Administrative Court left it to the Berlin's Appeal Court to interpret the meaning of "religious community" within the Berlin Schools Act. (UC Davis) On February 23, 2000, Germany's highest court for administrative law, the Bundesverwaltungsgericht, ruled that Berlin's Islamische Föderation may offer religious instruction in Berlin schools; although, Berlin school authorities must approve the curriculum.

The organization began teaching at 20 Berlin public schools in Fall 2002, and extended courses to 37 elementary schools in Fall of 2004.

DELIVERY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Nonetheless, over the last few years some federal states have reached agreements with various Islamic groups concerning instruction.

Each of the 16 states determines its own education system and how noncompulsory religion, or ethics, instruction is offered. Islamic instruction in some form is available in all former West German states, though none of the eastern ones, where there are historically few Muslim immigrants (Smale, 2014).

Many states have run trial Islamic programs, including North-Rhine/Westphalia, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Schleswig-Holstein, Bremen, Lower Saxony, Bavaria, and Rhineland-Palatinate.

In these states, advisory boards comprised of parents and representatives of non-official Islamic associations have been formed to determine IRE (Islamic Religious Education) content. German Professor Yasar Sarikaya has noted that the type of IRE offered in these pilot projects differed from that which is constitutionally guaranteed to German Muslims, in that it is non-denominational and primarily teaches Islamic culture and history. According to Sarikaya, the main reason for this is the complete lack of recognized official Islamic communities. (Berghlund, 2015)

Present situation is that in various German federal states, religious instruction has been offered to children of the Islamic faith on a voluntary basis. Aside from Berlin schools, curriculum is required to *exclude* preaching of the faith and education of the faith.

"No state has done more to bring Islam classes into schools than North Rhine Westphalia, where one-third of Germany's Muslims live. Here, 150 public schools offer Islamic studies to 13,000 children in Grades 1 through 10. About 200 schools nationally teach the courses, established by state governments and local Muslim groups". (Pommereau, 2010)

TEACHING OF ISLAM IN GERMAN LANGUAGE:

In March 2008, The German Conference on Islam under the chairmanship of Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble also called for a comprehensive introduction of the Islamic religion in public

schools, to be taught in German. He emphasized that programs taught by teachers with degrees from German universities would promote integration.

As part of this effort, Saphir, a textbook for fifth and sixth grade Islamic religious classes in Germany has been developed, with editions for grades seven through 10 underway as of November 2008. Issues covered include the concept of God, the life of the Prophet Mohammed, the structure of the Koran, social responsibility. Harry Harun Behr of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg says the book “does not aim to educate pupils to believe, but rather to make responsible decisions concerning faith.”

In Berlin, the Islamische Föderation (Islamic Federation) has been authorized to develop Islamic education programs alongside those voluntary programs in Christianity and Lebenskunde (knowledge about life). Islamische Föderation achieved this after twenty years of court procedures.

One of their recent developments is IKRA textbook in German for Islamic education.

SECTARIAN ISSUES:

Alevites, a Shiite denomination, have been especially successful in getting officially recognized as a religious community and be able to cooperate with the state to provide religious education in public schools in some states. However, the terms “Islamic” and “Muslim” do not appear this association’s formal self-description (Berglund, 2015b). This may potentially exposes non-shia students to ‘Shiite concept of Islam’ through state schools.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

In Germany, Article 7, section 4 of the German Basic Law established the right to operate private schools with government approval. However, the percentage of Germans that attend private schools is relatively low when compared to other European nations.

RESPONSE TO ISLAMIC EDUCATION FROM GERMAN SOCIETY:

Muslim religious education lessons have generated great public controversy with one set of citizens gathering under the banner of Islamophobia, such as PEGIDA, and other strongly opposing them.

Negative German attitudes toward Islam are not based on direct experience with Muslims, but are rather “imported” from media reports on international conflicts and terrorism in line with media’s excessive focus on conflicts involving Islam which has caused many Germans to wrongly conclude that Muslim integration in their country has completely failed.(Berglund, 2015b)

Since the introduction of Islamic instruction in Berlin, requests are coming up to consider religious values in other academic activities as well – school offices are often inundated with petitions to excuse girls from swimming, sports, and class field trips, based on religious grounds. The Islamische Föderation ran into trouble with the Berlin education ministry for allegedly disseminating pamphlets and forms to Muslim parents, advocating the exemption from their daughters from participating in co-educative classes.

There remains a great deal of skepticism among Berliners and about the Islamische Föderation and its public school program.

Muslim students also face certain restrictions at public school. According to recent court decision on a case of Muslim student praying in school hallway, court has ruled that religious should be kept out of school and the boy (and all other Muslim students) cannot pray at school ("No Religion at School," 2010).

OTHER FORMS OF EDUCATION

Fazil Altin, a lawyer who is president of the Islamic Federation, said Muslims and the city authorities in Berlin had wasted 20 years while they battled in court about whether Islam could be taught. Then, Mr. Altin said, the federation had to overcome suspicions about indoctrination — and all for 40 minutes' instruction per week, which he called "pretty paltry." (Smale, 2014)

In his view, it will take more than formal state instruction in Islam to bridge the cultural gap between observant Muslims and a highly secular German society. "It is difficult to be a Muslim in Germany," said Mr. Altin, who said he had been denied access to clients in jails because of his faith. "The fact is, we are seen as a danger."

In Germany, according to the Central Institute of Islamic Archives in Germany, less than 20 percent of all Muslim school children attend Koran schools.

In Berlin in June 2004, Muslims and non-Muslims joined forces and founded the Muslimische Akademie with the support of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Agency for Civic Education). The aims of the academy were to encourage the participation of Muslims, and offer an independent forum for inter- and intra-religious dialogue.

FRANCE

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The French public education system is framed and regulated by the principle of *laïcité* and by the 1989 Law on Orientation in Education, which affirms the individual right to freedom of conscience. In practice, these two principals have come into conflict, particularly with regard to students belonging to religious minorities like Islam.

"The concept of *laïcité* can be defined as the neutrality of the state towards religious beliefs, and the complete isolation of religious and public spheres. According to the concept of *laïcité*, the French state and government do not take a position on any religion or religious beliefs. They can only speak on religious subjects when considering the practical consequences of the beliefs and practices of a religion on the lives of its citizens. It also means, in theory at least, that there can be no interference by any religion in the functioning of the government. Equally it also means, in theory at least, that there can be no interference by the government in the religious life of its citizens, or in the forms of religion to which they adhere." ("The concept of *Laïcité* in France," 2007)

It is a central objective and responsibility of French public schools to train students in Republican values including *laïcité*, and to ensure both equal treatment of individual pupils and respect for pluralism. As such, local officials have the competence to regulate the public expression of religious belonging in schools. The conflict over the banning of the hijab illustrates the tension between public space and private choices; the difficulties inherent in balancing the requirements of *laïcité* against the needs of Muslim students.

In French primary schools, no religion course can be organized, whereas in secondary schools religion can be taught by chaplains (but not during the school timetable). However, as of 2004, no Islamic chaplaincy operated in any public secondary schools. In addition to this, the banning of the hijab in public schools has provided impetus for the establishment of independent Islamic schools in France.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

In France, the governing secularizing concept of *laïcité* in public schools means that private institutions are the only option for communities seeking Islamic education programs. In addition to *laïcité*, the debate over the hijab has further developed a demand for the establishment of state-approved private Islamic schools.

In theory, the Debré Law of 1959 introduced two possibilities for French Muslim private schools to receive state funding, along with the many Catholic and Jewish parochial schools: the simple contract (*contrat simple*) and the contract of association (*contrat d'association*). Under a simple contract, staff expenses are covered by the state for teachers and state-accredited professors. Though private schools with a simple contract have some autonomy in determining the content of their curricula, they are still obligated to educate students at comparable academic levels to schools offering official state accredited degrees. They must also assign authorized textbooks and develop curriculums and schedules similar to those in public schools. The contract of association allows for more significant financial support: the state pays for staff expenses and also for material expenses on the basis of costs in the public sector. It also allows more freedom in defining the content of the curriculum. Under either contract, a school cannot officially benefit from public financial support of more than 10 percent of their annual expenses.

FUNCTIONING PRIVATE ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:

The few existing private Islamic institutions include one school on the island of Réunion (the only institution under contract of association), established several decades ago; two in the northeast Paris suburb of Aubervilliers, established in 2001; one in Lille, established in 2003, and Lyon's lycée college Al Kindi, established in March 2007. None of these institutions is under either type of state contract.

"Averroès High School in Lille has been in the spotlight for a decade. Ten years ago, it was France's first private Muslim school to follow the national curriculum. Now, it's one of the country's top-rated schools" ("France - France's first private Muslim school tops the ranks," 2013). The school was founded by the local Muslim community in 2003, almost ten years after the exclusion of 19 girls from a nearby lycée for wearing the Islamic veil (MacGuill, 2013). Recalling the humble beginning of school in 2003, said Amar Lasfar, rector of the Lille mosque and president of the Averroès school said: "On our first day, there were 34 journalists, including one from Japan – compared to only 11 students and 19 teachers". School enrollments were reported to be 300 in 2013 ("France - France's first private Muslim school tops the ranks," 2013).

Another private school, Éducation et Savoir, opened its doors in the Parisian suburb of Vitry-sur-Seine (Val-de-Marne) in March 2008. The school offered one primary education class for the 2007-2008 school year, and has plans to accommodate 40 high school students through Spring 2009. In addition to state-mandated curriculum, the school will offer classes on Arabic and Islam.

FUNDING FOR ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:

Despite the Debré Laws, state support for private Islamic schools has only recently been acquired by only a few institutions.

The lack of representative bodies capable of negotiating for state funding, lack of long-standing and established schools, lack of suitable instructors, and the current political climate surrounding Islam in France have all been cited as reasons government funding remains difficult to obtain.

Private donors and associations in France have funded the school. Mahmoud Awwad, director at Éducation et Savoir school claims that their biggest challenge has not been obtaining an operation license, but obtaining funding.

La Reussite Islamic School, one of the two Aubervilliers institutions, is also experiencing severe financial issues.

OTHER EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

Because so many low-income Muslim families are unable to cover the full cost of tuition and fees, religious education of young Muslims is generally provided independently outside of school hours either by the family at home or by associations and mosques in the framework of Koranic courses.

MUSLIMS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS:

This increasing, unmet demand for affordable, quality Islamic education in France is currently fostering a new trend: the growth of Muslim enrollment in private Catholic schools. Educators estimate that Muslims now make up nearly 10 percent of France's Catholic school student body. Many families report feeling like the Catholic Church better understands and is more tolerant toward Islam than the French state, as it recognizes Muslim holidays, offers optional Arabic classes, and allows girls to wear the hijab.

Many parents say they have chosen the schools because they believe they all "share the same God." They also believe the schools better prepare students for college and career success, and it is affordable.

Catholic schools in France are considered to be much less expensive than private schools in other countries. In return for the schools' teaching the national curriculum and being open to students of all faiths, the government pays teachers' salaries and a per-student subsidy. Annual costs for parents average 1,400 euros (less than \$2,050) for junior high school and 1,800 euros (about \$2,630) for high school, according to the Roman Catholic educational authority.(Bennhold, 2008)

Muslim population in catholic schools go as high as 80% in some instances. Overall, out of 2 million catholic school places, 10% are occupied by Muslim students who are treated more favourably in these schools as compared to state schools.(Bennhold, 2008)

UNITED KINGDOM:

While the following overview primarily focuses on England, it should also be noted that significant differences exist between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland when it comes to the provision of education (Berglund, 2015).

There are an increasing number of different types of school in England, and it can be difficult to distinguish between them (*Comparison of different types of school - A guide to schools in England*, 2015). These schools differ from each other in terms of government regulation, choice of curriculum, funding, specialized subjects and other aspects. This in totality presents a complex situation which needs critical analysis.

About 7,000 state schools in Britain are faith schools – roughly one in three of the total – educating 1.7 million pupils. Of the 590 faith-based secondary schools five are Jewish, two Muslim and one Sikh - the rest are Church of England, Roman Catholic and other Christian faiths.

POPULATION CONTEXT:

“One third of Muslims are under age 16 as compared with one fifth of the population as a whole. There are approximately half a million Muslim children and young people currently receiving education in British schools and colleges. Increasing numbers of Muslims are entering further and higher education. As a result of this younger age profile, Government education policies aimed at children and young people will have a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities. It is vital, therefore, that Government departments and agencies implementing and delivering these policies lead the way in ensuring that policy is sensitive to the needs of Muslims” (Choudhury, 2005, p. 104).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY:

According to Dr. Jenny Berglund

“Religious education (RE) in England is a non-confessional multi-faith school subject; its aims are educational rather than religious. While it seeks to contribute to the pupil’s personal, spiritual, and intellectual development, it avoids cultivating an interest in and/or promoting any particular religion—or, for that matter, “religion” in general.” (Berglund, 2015)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

The UK currently provides no specific instruction on Islamic education in public schools. However, local education authorities are able to support ethnic minority communities to set up supplementary schools, which provide education in evenings or on Saturdays, to maintain linguistic and cultural traditions.

SCHOOLING CHOICES BY PARENTS AND KEY ISSUES:

“Whilst Islam is slowly but steadily growing amongst the indigenous population of the UK - and we now have the first children born to Muslim converts at the compulsory school age (5-16) -, the majority of Muslim pupils in the UK are born to immigrant families, mostly of the second generation. For some time, Muslim immigrants heard other pressing difficulties to solve and the education of their children remained a low ranking priority. It was only after a large number of Muslims acquired a standard of living comparable to that of their non-Muslim contemporaries, that they started worrying about their children's Islamic education and upbringing. By then, the un-monitored exposure to Western norms and life styles had already produced painful results for many parents. Not only were Muslim children not able to read the Qur'an nor had any knowledge about their faith, but also did they copy the life style of their non-Muslim class fellows and broke with their inherited cultural norms” (Bleher, 1991).

With regards to current situation, there is significant diversity in what Muslim parents want. While some would like to send their children to schools with an Islamic ethos, others merely want single-sex schooling; others again would be happy to send their children to community or church schools so long as these are respectful of their faith and supportive of their distinctive identity. The majority of Muslims in the UK attend community school. However, at present many Muslim parents feel that community schools are not meeting the needs of their children (Choudhury, 2005, p. 104).

Many Muslim parents would appreciate the option for their children to study Arabic in school, and also for them to receive a form of Religious Education that gave them more opportunities to enrich their understanding of their own faith as well as studying others.

The key educational issues concerning Muslim parents are:

- the continuing poor academic results of Muslim children;
- the need to eradicate institutional racism and racist and Islamophobic bullying;
- the lack of recognition or support for their children's faith identity; and
- the inadequacy of spirituals and moral education that schools provide.

Some Muslim parents and communities have concern that mainstream schools are unable to fulfill the desired path of learning. In addition to above, lack of appropriate facilities and curriculum, policies that may be insensitive to Islamic belief, and the increase of exclusionary feelings among Muslim students are found to play their role.

Discrimination and negative attitudes towards Islam have manifested in the Muslim experience of the mainstream education system. For example, 32 percent of 110 polled Muslims in Hackney aged 15-25 surveyed by the North London Muslim Housing Association reported poor performance in school was sometimes attributed to the lack of familiarity and sensitivity of teachers concerning Islam. In addition, many reported that expectations concerning their achievement were low, and they were not encouraged to perform well. The FOSIS (Federation of Students Islamic Societies in UK and Ireland) cites reported incidents of verbal and physical abuse, threats, and alienation.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:

In the UK, local education authorities are able to support ethnic minority communities to set up independent "supplementary" schools on evenings and Saturdays, which provide education in the evening or on Saturdays to maintain linguistic and cultural traditions of immigrant populations.

Religious communities have a right to establish their own independent schools. Such schools must be registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools and must meet certain minimum standards.

According to Bleher (1991) in an article on Islamic Party of Britain website:

"The British education system has two main streams: the maintained sector, i.e. schools run by the government, and the independent sector, i.e. private schools. If independent schools fulfill certain requirements, they may obtain voluntary aided status, that is they will largely be financed by the government whilst retaining their independent character. This is the case of the Catholic and Church of England schools, a number of Jewish schools, and schools following other ideologies or

educational theories. Applications by Muslim schools have however been prejudiced in the past, and many politicians have argued that the door for opening further voluntary aided schools should be closed to avoid the teaching of Islamic fundamentalism. Anybody at any time can open an independent school. This school has to register with the Department for Education (DfE) for a provisional registration. Once it has started to operate, it is then visited by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Independent Schools (HMI) who comment on the suitability of the building and the educational provision. The building has to be of sufficient size and has to comply with fire and safety regulations, the number and qualifications of the teachers, materials and organization have to be adequate for the number and age of children attending the school. If the HMI find the situation satisfactory, the school will be given final registration by the DES, otherwise it will be served a notice of complaint. If after a given time it fails to meet the requirements laid down in the notice of complaint, it has to close and stop operating". While the legal situation theoretically permitted the setting up of a Muslim school, in practice there were a number of obstacles. First of all, a suitable building had to be found. The other challenge mentioned by Bleher was shortage of Muslim teachers with right qualifications. The situation was compounded by lack of leadership.

In order to take Islamic schools to next steps, these issues need to be considered at community level. Responsibility lies with individuals, societies and organizations to think beyond racial belonging, nationalities and sects and help grow Islamic schools in accordance with relevant legislative requirements and educational best-practices.

In England and Wales, there has traditionally been State funding for Church of England, Catholic, and Jewish faith schools. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, there has traditionally been state funding for Catholic schools. Since 1997, the Labour government has extended this funding to other minority faith schools, including Muslim schools.

At present there is state funding of seven Muslim schools, among them: Al Furqan School in Birmingham, Islamia School in London and Feversham College in Bradford. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that there is a "significant interest" among about 30 of England's 120 independent Muslim schools to enter the state sector, and the government has indicated that the number of faith schools in the UK could increase in the coming years.

Of the over 120 Muslim schools in Britain, at least 37 are in London. In London, the debate around Muslim-only schools and other faith-based schools continues to generate deliberations both in and outside of Muslim communities. The debate concerns the ability for faith-based schools to receive state (and tax-generated) funding; however, schools may only do so after proving they have qualified staff, facilities, and teaching curriculum.

Parents and community provide the funding for the majority of these schools, while the Waqf Al-Birr Educational Trust and the UK Islamic Waqf have made financial contributions to others.

DEBATE ABOUT FAITH SCHOOLS:

"At present, education policy views minorities only in terms of race and ethnicity. In particular, although many Muslim children and young people experience Islamophobia both in and out of school, anti-discrimination policy in education tend to focus much more on racial or ethnic discrimination, rather than religious discrimination. Without the collection of data on the basis of religion, education policy will not be able to meet the needs of individuals from different faith communities" (Choudhury, 2005, p. 105).

On the other hand, proposals to increase the role of faith schools in the state education sector have generated much debate. The Commission for Racial Equality has expressed concern that single faith schools could damage multiculturalism, and the Cattle Report cautioned that the funding of faith schools would increase social segregation between different minority communities. One response to this is a proposal by faith communities for “multi-faith” schools that would appreciate faith but would not be targeted at a particular faith. This is inline with what many European countries practice under the banner of non-confessionary religious education.

In January 2008, a House of Commons select committee raised concerns about the government’s proposals to increase the number of independent faith schools in the UK.) These proposals remain a lively topic of conversation in the UK today.

The government remains committed to increasing the role of faith schools in the State sector but has said that new faith schools will have to “demonstrate how they will be inclusive and work in partnership with other schools.” The government recently rejected a proposal in the Cattle Report that at least 25 percent of the intake in a faith school reflect the other cultures and ethnicities within the local area, but they want to “encourage all schools to ensure that their intake reflects the local community in all their diversity.”

Some of the Muslim schools are delivering best educational results in UK. “With students achieving amazing results, Islamic schools have been rated as the highest-achieving learning institutes in Britain”(“Islamic Schools Rated Britain’s Best,” 2013). Tauheedul Islam Girls’ High School in the industrial town of Blackburn, was the highest-achieving educational institute in the city with Darwen in North West England in 2013. Results showed that 95 percent of students achieved 5+ A*-C (including English and Maths), while 76 percent achieved the newly introduced English Baccalaureate. The outcome places the Islamic school nationally above all non-selective schools. Statistics from the Department of Education also showed that Tauheedul is the best school in the country for achievement by students with low prior achievement at primary school.

The majority of students with low prior achievement (93 percent) achieved 5A*-Cs (including English and Maths) at Tauheedul, nationally.

In 2014, a controversy arose about some of the Muslims schools in which school inspection authorities believed that student well-being was at risk as chief inspector noted that “all the schools focused too heavily on Islamic teachings” (Richardson, 2014). One of the recommendations was that "All schools must prepare children for life in modern Britain." At one school, inspectors found pupils did not know the difference between sharia and British law. This is criticized by many, including school administration, as not the best of questions to ask school students. When we analyze all the findings, we can link them to following three broader categories:

- Potential for leadership improvement in Islamic schools
- Requirement for a critical review of compliance against national educational requirements
- More proactive engagement with authorities, parents and community members in clarifying misunderstandings and confusions (such as interpretation of ‘shariah’ by most western authorities)

Muslim community needs to tackled these issues on this front. There are some other key challenges as well which need immediate consideration.

In the age of growing Islamophobia and skewed representation of Islam by deviant groups like self-proclaimed ISIS and fear-mongering media, development of authentic scholarship and ensuring at least base level Islamic education for all Muslim is essential to preserve faith and enable Muslims lead a confident life as contributing members of British society.

OTHER SCHOOLING OPTIONS:

There are approximately 250,000 Muslim children attending roughly 2,000 weekend/ evening madrasas in the UK. Children typically attend for up to two hours every night until the age of 14-15. Most madrasas operate out of mosques, but a sizeable number are based in schools or community centres. Some are run informally in private homes. Over a quarter have more than 140 pupils a week (Bawden, 2011).

There are some differences from location to location and place of birth of immigrant families. For example, A high proportion of Bradford's Muslim population has family roots in south Asia, and in many cases they come from rural areas of Kashmir. About 9,000 children in Bradford top up their regular state school education with at least an hour of instruction at a madrassa or religious school, several days a week. According to a report by Bradford council of mosques, this number is expected to keep on increasing.

According to The Economist ("Learning to live together, or separately," 2013):

It also notes that many religious part-time/ supplementary Islamic schools "have a very narrow understanding of faith education - for example, limited to assisting children to identify and read the Quranic text, to memorise the five pillars of Islam and to be able to offer the five prayers. This is very basic, essential and highly commendable but parents desire their children to be given a fuller understanding of the faith..." And unfortunately, not all parents were as demanding as they should be. Indeed many "operate from a very low expectation base" and feel that "as long as [their children] come out being able to read the Quran, perform five daily prayers and know some other basics they are quite content."

In certain schools, there is "considerable difficulty" for children who receive most of their education in English and find their madrassa teacher is addressing them in a language of which they have "very basic or no command". What that means in hard reality, according to people who know the Bradford scene, is that in the poorest madrassas the teacher speaks nothing much but Urdu, which the English-born pupils hardly understand.

"The fact that Islam was more or less seen as a cultural pattern and that lessons were offered in Urdu rather than in English, whilst the Qur'an was deciphered but not understood or explained, produced a situation whereby the children experienced two un-reconcilable worlds: the home and the mosque on the one hand; school and society at large on the other. Naturally, the influence of non-Muslim society gained the upper hand, as children were exposed to its leaching all day long, re-enforced by TV programmes which their parents uncritically permitted them to watch. Until now there is little critical evaluation of the influences of mass media, especially TV, amongst the Muslim community, and the situation has become more bleak through the introduction of video programmes which spread rapidly within Muslim homes. The weekend school, sometimes complemented through evening classes, was unable to instill lasting values within the children or foster a proper understanding of Islam. Teachers faced tired children who were hardly motivated, and had to combat the effects of the day school which offered more excitement and imposed greater authority" (Bleher, 1991). Due to these factors,

children frequently reacted to the obligatory attendance at Islamic evening or weekend classes by distancing themselves from Islamic schools.

A far more detailed knowledge of the faith is imparted by Bradford's full-time Islamic schools which presents secular and religious subjects under an 'Islamic Prism'.

However, it needs to be kept in mind that these evening or weekend schools are the only exposure many children have for Islam. What is required to be done to make these part-time supplementary institutions a 'fun' thing for children to attend which they should look up to every evening or every week. There is no doubt that mosque committees have a huge role to play in this. However, role of parents cannot be undermined who need to ensure good Islamic upbringing at homes as well as actively participate in improving community organizations. Only criticizing and not taking any practical steps to nurture and develop good community organizations would not help Muslim community at all considering the times and situations expected to be seen in coming years and decades.

ITALY

In this very Catholic country, there have always been other religions: a sprinkling of Waldensian Protestants in the north, traces of Islam in Sicily, well-established but small Jewish neighborhoods in Rome, Venice, and other big cities. But for the first time in centuries, a minority religion is set to become a major player in Italy's future. Fueled largely by immigration from North Africa, the Middle East, and Albania, Islam is now the second-largest faith in what is still a nation that is 94 percent Catholic. Italy's demographic changes provide a modern challenge, not only for these two world religions, but also for this nation positioned at the crossroads of continents, faith, and history.

"Several Catholic churches look suspiciously like mosques, having been transformed into churches when Christians retook Sicily in the year 991, after two centuries of Tunisian rule left a lasting Islamic stamp on the island. Over the past millennium, however, the religious life of Italy and its islands has been the domain of the Catholic Church"(Israely, 2008).

Italy has a wide mix of Muslims that mirrors the diversity of the faith around the world: There are some 10,000 Italian-born converts, a largely moderate flock from Morocco, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, and vast numbers of arrivals from Albania. The Muslim community has not received official government recognition - bestowed on an array of smaller faiths, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Buddhists - that would guarantee state-approved religious education, finance mosques and associations, and legalize Muslim marriage rites.

LEGISLATION REGARDING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES:

Under Article 8, Paragraph 3 of the Italian constitution, all religious communities, including Islamic ones, may use the classrooms of state schools for religious education when the number of members of the concerned religious denomination is considerable, and when there are no available places of worship.

FUNDING:

The costs of such teaching is not with state funds, but paid by the religious community. An agreement with the Director of the Regional School Office is also necessary.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS:

Under the Italian legal system, it is a legal requirement that schools provide Catholic religious education from an early age, though parents may opt their children out of this curriculum.

ALTERNATE TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

According to an Italian court decisions, alternatives to catholic education need to be provided ("IHEU | Italian court rules that schools must provide alternative to religion classes," 2010).

The alternative to the Catholic education class is non-religious alternative course, in which material such as mythology legends and human rights are discussed – but only a minority of parents opts for this alternative curriculum.

Some schools offer secular subjects such as Music or economics etc. as an alternative (HABERMAN, 1988).

In 2012, an Islamophobic controversy arose when Italian education minister, Francesco Profumo, was portrayed as proposing Islam to be taught in public schools alongside the traditional teaching of Roman Catholicism. This controversy was quite baseless as he did not use the word 'Islam' but merely referred to pupils "from different countries, cultures and religions," and a "more multiethnic" "multicultural" curriculum (Bodissey, 2012). Some journalists even tried to further drift public opinion by attaching 'emotions' and fear-mongering such as in the article "Italy: Land of Gourmet Food, Art, Wine, Opera and...the Muslim Brotherhood? It Might Not Be Far-Fetched" (Tiffany Gabbay, 2012). Statistics do not show possibility of 'Muslim conversion' of country at all and majority of Muslim women do not get "cloaked in the darkness of a black burqa" as this article tries to portray.

ISSUES FACED BY MUSLIM PUPILS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The presence of Catholic symbols, largely crucifixes in courtrooms, schools, hospitals, and other public buildings has drawn criticism and complaint in a number of court cases and lawsuits, and further accentuates the minority status of the religion of Islam.

It is also highlighted by some researchers that many of the religious education teachers in schools are previous Christian missionaries (Yahya, 2009) and education in general has a flavor of ethnocentric and orientalist ideas.

Like other European countries, Islamophobic events are observed in Italian schools as well. Recently, an Italian headmaster has banned female Muslim students from wearing headscarves, claiming they constitute a "provocation". Aldo Duri, the headmaster of a school in the north-eastern Italian town Cervignano del Friuli, said that the measure, which applies in six colleges in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, had been made to promote the values of "tolerance, respect and equality". In a recent incident, an Egyptian pupil was allegedly admitted to hospital for seven days after being attacked by a fellow pupil following an argument in class, reports *Messaggero Veneto* (Porter, 2015).

The decision to ban head-scarf was later reversed on the advice of the Friuli region's personal-rights watchdog ("Friuli school head revokes Islamic veil ban - English," 2015).

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

Article 33 of the Italian constitution grants private citizens and organizations the right to establish schools and educational institutes. As a result of the lack of public Islamic education programs, several foreign schools have been founded in Italy by governments of several Mediterranean states, including two by Libya (in Rome and Milan), and one by Egypt (in Milan).

In 2005, an Islamic school in Milan was closed, citing hygienic problems as the official reason. The media however, put stress on the idea that famous Islamic terrorists were suspected to have attended the school.

BULGARIA

Orthodox church and Muslim community in Bulgaria consider confessional religious education in public schools as a key requirement to preserve statehood and cultural identities. Secular sectors within Bulgaria however oppose that and propose 'comparative religion' instead (Hajdinjak & Kosseva, 2011). Idea is however not approved by government (Petrov, 2012).

Islamic education in Bulgaria operate formally as well as informally with around 700 weekend or after-school classes happening in country (Osterman, 2014). In addition to regular part-time schools, Quranic summer schools are also organized (Merdjanova, 2013).

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee has compiled a very useful and extensive report about Muslim minorities in Bulgaria. From this report, we come to know following relevant information(BHC, 2003):

Art. 15(3) of the Law on Educational Degree, Educational Minimum, and Educational Plan of July 1999, as amended in 2002, stipulates that the mother tongue and religion classes are included in the section "obligatory selectable" courses on both primary/secondary and high school level. However, while the Turkish as a mother tongue instruction were introduced on an "obligatory elective" basis at schools, the study of religion remained on a "freely elective" level, and what is more, religious classes were practically realized only in limited number of schools during the 2002-2003 academic year.

Ordinance No. 6 of May 28, 2001 of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) confirms the status of Religion/"Religion Islam" as "a freely elective" subject by virtue of Art. 20. The instructions in the Christian religion - under the name "Religion", and in Islam - under-"Religion Islam", is governed by Supplement No. 4 of the ORGANIZATION AND Management of the Activities in Schools of General Education, Professional and Special Schools during 2002-2003 Academic Year of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Supplement No. 4 contains Instruction regulating the teaching of "Religion"/"Religion Islam" on a "freely elective" basis (i.e. classes, which are outside the frame of the regular school curriculum, and are not counted towards the students' GPA) "in the municipal schools of Republic of Bulgaria". The Instruction establishes that Christian religion is studied from 1st to 8th grades of primary and secondary school, and Islam is studied from 2nd to 7th grades of primary and secondary school, each one class per week.

The Instruction in question makes the study of “Religion”/“Religion Islam” contingent upon students’ wish, expressed in a written request by the student, signed by his/her parent or guardian, and submitted to the school’s principal.

The Ministry of Education’s Organization and Management of the Activities in Schools of General Education, Professional and Special Schools during 2002-2003 Academic Year (p. 15, point 13), further envisages the “experimental study of Religion” in 128 schools throughout the country - one class per week - on an “obligatory elective” basis from 1st to 4th grade. It is, however, far from clear whether the provision includes only the study of Christian religion - referred to as “Religion”, or includes Islam as well - referred to as “Religion Islam” since the provision only mentions the term “Religion”.

Only from the data presented in the state’s report under Art. 25 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of February 14, 2003 (see above), it becomes clear that the study of Islam as part of the regular school curricula (“obligatory elective”), was organized in 7 schools throughout the country with a total of 702 students enrolled, for the 2001/2002 academic year. Instructions in Orthodox Christianity for the same school year, on the other hand, were performed in 128 schools, with a total of 10,154 students in classes. As an optional subject (“freely elective”) the study of Islam is reported to have been organized in only 2 schools with 554 students enrolled, against the figure of 213 schools with 8,674 students studying Orthodox Christianity for the same academic year. Now juxtaposing the figure of about more than one million Muslims in Bulgaria, whose population is less than 8 million in total, the sum of 9 schools with 1,256 students enrolled in studying Islam as a religion is far from a satisfactory situation altogether.

Issues related to textbooks and supplementary materials in “Religion Islam” is another side of the problem of inadequate study of Islam at schools. From the visits we made to regions with compact Turkish minority population, it transpired that the number of schools, which include instructions in “Religion Islam” is not only limited, but what is more important, the literature provided for solely by the Chief Mufti’s Office appeared to be both narrow in terms of subject matter (i.e. only history of Islamic religion), and small as a volume (i.e. a relatively thin textbook, printed in large shrift, half of which is in Bulgarian, and the other half with the same content - in Turkish. As a supplement to the textbook there are several very thin and large-shrift booklets, whose total content students could exhaust in the course of several classes only.).

In her extensive study on Bulgarian Muslim minority, Ina Merdjanova (2013) presents following details about secondary education for Muslim students and funding of education providers:

Currently, there are three Islamic secondary schools in Shumen, in Russe and in Momchilgrad which follow the general curriculum for the state secondary schools, with additional classes in Islam. Seventy percent of the classes are on secular subjects (taught in Bulgarian) and 30 percent on religious subjects (taught in Turkish, mostly by teachers from Turkey). The schools are sponsored by the Chief Muftiate with funds from the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet). These are not medrese institutions in the traditional sense of the word. They are coeducational, with girls and boys studying together. In the current successor of the Nuvvap school in Shumen, which the author visited in March 2009, for example, there were 82 students, 42 girls and 40 boys. Almost all students were of Turkish ethnicity, with a few Turkish-speaking Roma students. The graduates from the secondary Islamic schools can serve as imams or continue their education in any chosen discipline; there is a growing tendency for the imams to pursue higher education in the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia.

On the basis of the constitutional separation of religion from the state, after the fall of Communism the state discontinued its practice of paying the salaries of religious personnel. Each year, the Directorate of Religious Confessions at the Council of Ministers allots some financial support from the state budget to several denominations (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Islamic Community, the Central Israeli Spiritual Council, some Protestant churches, and others). The support is meant mostly on the renovation of various religious sites of those communities and for covering some of their running expenses. The slow and partial restitution of the waqf properties related to the disputes over the leadership, on the one hand, and the often missing documentation about those properties, on the other, has made the Islamic Community heavily dependent on foreign funds. Turkey has been the most consistent and visible sponsor. This also gives more DIYANET more control on selecting teachers and influencing curriculum.

NETHERLANDS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

In the Netherlands, parents have the right to obtain religious education for their children in public schools under the 1984 Dutch Education Act, but they must find and pay the teacher (or relevant Churches do this on their behalf). Muslim parents use this legal opportunity only in exceptional cases.

Some municipalities (like Rotterdam), however, subsidize religious education. School authorities retain the power to choose which language courses are taught in, which has limited the development of Islamic religious instruction.

Burqas and face coverings were recently banned in Amsterdam's public schools. School authorities cited that the need for open student-teacher interaction superceded the need to wear a face covering. In 2003 at a higher vocational college in Amsterdam, three students were banned for wearing a face covering. However, the Equal Opportunities Committee (CGB) soon deemed the ban discriminatory. In 2005, the issue surfaced again when Parliament adopted a resolution urging the Government to ban the public wearing of face coverings. However, the integration minister stated that a comprehensive ban was not possible under the law—instead, he said that the ban may be permissible in case-specific scenarios such as in public schools.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

In the Netherlands, the Dutch constitutional freedom of education allows religions to open their own schools at the state's expense.

In contrast to most EU countries (the other exception being Belgium), the majority of Dutch primary and secondary students (76.3 per cent) attend the private, mainly confessional sector of education (Pépin, 2009, p. 87).

“With the presence in the country of a growing Muslim community, the state has supported the setting up of Islamic schools. There are 48 at primary level (attended by only about 5 per cent of Muslim children) and two at secondary level. In response to family demand, some municipalities have also supported the setting up of Islamic teaching in public schools, given, for example, by a local imam. Such teaching can be for up to three hours per week. It is only available, however, in 7 per cent of public primary schools” (Pépin, 2009, p. 90).

The majority of the day in Islamic schools must offer courses that follow a national curriculum, and a few hours per week may be allotted to religious lessons and ceremonies. In the beginning of the 2007 academic year, all Dutch Islamic primary schools were provided with an official Islamic teaching curriculum for pupils ages 4 through 12.

The new curriculum, the first of its kind in the Netherlands, was first presented at the As-Soeffah School in Amsterdam. The methodology and curriculum were developed by the Foundation for Teaching Methods (SLO) and the Board of Islamic Schools Organization (ISBO) – an umbrella organization of forty-two Muslim schools in the Netherlands. In the 2007 academic year, all 42 of the ISBO schools as well as 4 other Islamic schools in the Netherlands began to apply the new material.

As of 2002, Amsterdam housed eight private Islamic primary schools and one secondary school. According to the Schools Inspectorate, seven of the eight Islamic primary schools performed well in promoting integration and social cohesion in Dutch society. The eighth primary school – the Siddieq School, founded in 1989, was the only school that was cited as needing “a better balance between passing identity-bounded norms and values, and norms that ease the participation of pupils in Dutch society.”

It was an unfortunate situation in 2008 when the Dutch education ministry confirmed that 86 percent of Islamic schools had been using state funds fraudulently. Illegal expenditures uncovered in recent investigations included paychecks for wives of board members who pretended to be teachers, transportation that was never purchased or used, and plane tickets to Saudi Arabia for individuals completely unaffiliated with the schools. The education ministry is pursuing an estimated 4.5 million euros from schools. They have also pledged to increase state oversight of programs.

Such fraudulent behavior is blatantly un-Islamic and heavily undermines principles of Islamic education, morale of Muslim minority and their impression in front of a supportive government. Islamic organizations, including schools, need to be specifically careful about who they choose as their leaders.

SPAIN:

Spain is a decentralized country with 17 autonomous Communities which have wide powers; for instance, health and education are managed at Community level. The majority of students (68.7 per cent) in primary and secondary go to state schools. However, the share of grant-aided private education is relatively large (26.4 per cent of all students); 4.9 per cent are in non-grant-aided private schools.¹²⁸ Grant-aided private education is composed of 70 per cent Catholic schools (Pépin, 2009, p. 78).

“The different laws on education (Ley Orgánica de Educación – LOE) recognize parents’ rights to educate their children according to their religious and moral beliefs (article 27.3 of the constitution); freedom of choice between state and private schools; and non-discrimination over access on ideological, religious, moral, social or racial grounds. The new LOE of 2006 aims to simplify all existing laws and now constitutes the legal framework for the Spanish education system. Its implementation over five years began in 2006/7” (Pépin, 2009).

An important step forward in terms of Islamic education in public schools was the 1992 cooperation agreement between the Spanish state and the Islamic Commission of Spain, which recognized, among

other things, the right to have Islam taught in state schools (similar agreements were reached in the same year regarding the Protestant and Jewish religions). However, although some progress has been made – for example, since 2005 the teaching of Islam has been provided in some state primary schools in Andalusia, Catalonia and Madrid. For more than a decade, implementation of the agreement has been very weak and fraught with difficulties (Pépin, 2009, p. 30).

However, since the change in government in 2004 there has been a noticeable shift in Spain's approach to its Muslim minority. The new government has made efforts to implement the agreement and give equal treatment to Muslims in education. A pilot program of religious education is underway, with a more substantial implementation expected as more teachers are trained and other organizational difficulties are worked through.

Despite this, Muslims are arguing that Catholic schools receive preferential treatment in state support. This argument is supported by findings from Pepin (2009) who suggests: "As things stand, in spite of existing agreements, the Jewish, Protestant and Muslim faiths are not on the same footing as the Catholic religion. The Muslim religion suffers most clearly from this discrimination" (Pépin, 2009, p. 80).

BELGIUM:

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In Belgium, the state supports instruction in any state recognized religion and non-denominational ethics, including Islam. The Muslim community therefore has the right to provide teachers at government expense for religious instruction.

Such instruction has been provided since the 1975–1976 school year, when salaried posts for Muslim teachers became legalized and available.

Since 1998, the Muslim Executive Council (MEC) in Belgium has facilitated the relationship between the state and public Islamic education. The state appoints teachers in Islam upon recommendation by the (MEC).

For many years, these teachers were contracted out by the embassies of the respective governments. Since 1986 all instructors of Islamic education in Belgium are required to have either Belgian nationality or a minimum of five years residency, demonstrate the ability to give instruction in either Dutch or French, and receive a diploma recognized by the Ministry of National Education (Merry & Driessen, 2005)

MEC also develops and submits curriculum to the state for approval.

Generally the subjects taught include the Qur'an (with recitation), the fiqh (Islamic law and jurisprudence), the seerah (life of the Prophet and the period of the first four Caliphs), and Islamic dogma.

Belgian public school students under age 17 then have the option of participating in either the non-denominational ethics or religious classes offered, including those in Islam, however, minimum threshold has to be researched for number of students.

Estimates suggest that roughly 40% of Muslim children attend Islamic instruction in state schools, while the majority attends the non-confessional ethics classes (Shadid & van Koningsveld, 1995). Many Muslim parents feel that these classes are lacking in substantive content (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Another possible reason for this is higher secularism among parents, particularly of those with Moroccan origins.

Beyond age 17, these classes are voluntary.

Islamophobia in schools is on the rise in Belgium in line with recent trend across Europe. After France, there have been cases where Muslim girls were not only denied their head scarfs but also denied school entry based on length of their skirts with some reports suggesting students being asked to roll over sleeves and skirts or leave the school ("Belgian School Stirs Uproar Over Short Skirts," 2015; Dunya News, 2015; Tamli, 2015; TUNAKAN, 2015).

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

While Islamic education programs in Belgium's public schools have been developed, religious communities have also been given the right to establish private schools that are eligible for state funding.

Muslims are, therefore, allowed to establish schools with the same Belgian curriculum and under the supervision of Belgian authorities. These authorities also offer the salaries of the teachers in the Muslims schools.

The normal education in the Islamic schools is given in the French language, due to the large population of Moroccan and Tunisian pupils in these schools.

Currently, there are three primary Islamic schools in Brussels.

The first called Al Ghazali was established in 1989, the second called the Pen (al Qalam) in 2011 and the third called Al Fadilah (Virtue) in 2013.

First Islamic school's opening was criticized by some politicians (Merry & Driessen, 2005) but their arguments were not found to have a solid ground in terms of Belgian constitution.

The three schools have around 800 pupils.

Amid growing demand for Islamic education, Belgium's first Islamic secondary school is going to open soon, accommodating scores of students who have been waiting for a place to pursue their studies. ("Belgium Gets First Islamic Secondary School," 2015)

"There is a strong demand for Islamic education among the Muslim community in Belgium but our schools regretfully cannot accommodate all the pupils and this year we have about 200 pupils who are waiting to find a place," Mohammad Allaf, secretary general of the six-member committee of Islamic education in Belgium, told KUNA news agency on Tuesday, September 1.

The new school will offer places for 144 boys and girls, who have already registered. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of 40 places.

"But the philosophy of the education in our schools is our responsibility in order to teach Islamic religion and Arab culture to the pupils," Allaf said, noting that pupils in the Islamic schools celebrate all the Islamic holidays.

Two hours of special classes in Arabic language are held after the normal school hours in the Islamic schools, but participation is voluntary.

"From this year we have been allowed to open an Islamic school on the secondary level which will open on Thursday 3 September and will be called Al Fadilah 2. This is the first time that a secondary Islamic school will open in Belgium," said Allaf, who is a Belgian citizen of Moroccan origin.

4th primary Islamic school is expected to open in Forest in 2016 as currently Islamic schools do not meet the demand from Muslim parents ("The Brussels Times - Islamic schools turning pupils away," 2015).

In addition to these schools, there is also a non-recognized Islamic school located in Molenbeek, the Avicenna Islamic School, which receives no state subsidies. ("Islamleraars deelden lijfstraffen uit," 2008)

The school is theoretically open to Muslim and non-Muslim boys and girls, and the enrollment fee is 1,800 euros. It is not yet recognized by the state, so the school's diplomas have no official state value. Graduating students must first pass a test by the Belgian public examination board to receive an officially-recognized certificate.

According to De Standaard, the Islamic Platform League is the "driving force" behind the school. In its press release concerning the school's opening, the League stated that in no way did it intend for the Avicenna School to be a "ghetto school." Its mission is as follows: "to prepare the students for taking an active place in society, and ensure equal opportunities for emancipation for all students."

It is important to note that one parent interviewed by the internet news service Mediascrape decided to send his child to the private Islamic Avicenna Islamic School, citing his primary concern as being the poor quality of public schools in the neighborhood.

In Belgium, Islamophobia is growing and availability of Islamic education options accordingly receive much criticism. Politicians have also been observed passing statements considered inappropriate by majority of Belgian Muslims.

"Worthy of mention here is the Vlaams Blok party. Owing to a strong cultural preservationist movement, the Blok has enjoyed unprecedented success for the past fifteen years. Much of its message has focused on the incompatibility of Islamic culture with western cultures and values. At times its leaders have openly sought the deportation of Muslims to their countries of origin. It is largely in reaction to the anti-Muslim rhetoric of groups like the Blok that Muslims have begun to organize themselves"(Merry & Driessen, 2005)

GREECE

According to Law 1566/85, one of the goals of both Primary and Secondary Education is "to have faith to the country and the genuine elements of the orthodox Christian tradition", and "to realize the

deeper meaning of the orthodox Christian ethos”(MAGHIOROS, 2010). Prevalent religion in state schools is accordingly Greek Orthodox.

Education for Muslims in Greece is heavily dominated by international political factors.

INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT:

The Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed between Greece and Turkey at the end of World War I, provides for the rights of the Greek minority in Istanbul and the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. This treaty dictates that public schools should be established for children from the Muslim community in Western Thrace.

MUSLIM ‘MINORITY’ SCHOOLS:

Currently, there are 235 minority primary schools in Greece (HRI, 2014). The minority schools function with a semi-autonomous status. Laws No. 694 and 695 of 1977 provide the basic provisions for the structure of minority education. Muslim minority consider ‘mixed’ approach to administration as a tool to allow the state to interfere with the internal affairs of the minority without providing the necessary means of support (Boussiakou, 2007).

Instruction is in both Turkish and Greek in line with treaty which allows education in mother-tongue (Boussiakou, 2007).

Western Thrace also maintains two high schools to prepare Muslim students for higher level studies in Islamic theology. However, such instruction has not been available for communities of Muslims outside Thrace. And although Muslims are allowed to opt out of instruction in Greek Orthodoxy, various organizational issues sometimes make this difficult.

The level of education provided to the Muslim students depends, on a legal and political level, on the standard of education provided for the Greek minority in Turkey on the basis of reciprocity. The principle of reciprocity upon which the minority educational system is based constitutes a serious obstacle to the constructive learning of Muslim students in minority schools. The text of the Treaty of Lausanne does not seem to correspond to the educational needs of the Muslim students.(Boussiakou, 2007)

Accordingly, the Muslim minority schools in Thrace are considered poor schools which often face closures (Boussiakou, 2007), and lack ability to meet labor market demands.

State-run secondary schools provide places for approximately 400 students, despite the fact that there are 8,500 students attending minority primary schools. The Greek government argues that, under the Treaty of Lausanne, they are only obliged to provide a bilingual education during primary school. According to modern needs, basic education is considered to be both primary and secondary. The shortage of spaces in the two minority high schools has effectively resulted in many students of the Muslim minority not completing the mandatory nine years of education, let alone entering higher education. (Boussiakou, 2007)

Due to this very low level of education provided in the minority schools, one of the most dramatic consequences is the high level of Muslim students who tend to drop out because of the burdensome and inappropriate educational practices. Many Muslim students leave school at an early stage or

choose to emigrate, usually to Turkey, due to the isolation they suffer in Greece from the general system of communication, including the Greek language, social values and the media (Boussiakou, 2007).

MUSLIMS STUDENTS AT NON-MINORITY SCHOOLS:

It is important to note that parents who are members of the minority have the option to register their children in Greek-speaking public schools. In the last few years, the 'elite' of the Muslim minority has increasingly been sending its children to non-minority schools.

The right of exemption from religious education, prayer and attending mass is recognized for non-Orthodox pupils, if they themselves (when they are adults) or their parents on their behalf request exemption for reasons of conscience (MAGHIOROS, 2010).

It is a common phenomenon, however, that if a Muslim family decides to register their children at a Greek public school, they face exclusion from the rest of the minority. Very few students, mostly those who live in urban centres, study in non-minority schools. Those students often experience a cultural conflict directly between their family and their community and indirectly between the family itself and the Muslim minority. (Boussiakou, 2007).

This decision could possibly be due to lower level of educational standards in state-run minority schools. However, it often results in discrimination at schools.

Recently, the Greek government has attempted to improve the educational opportunities of the members of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. Economic incentives, preferential admissions policies at universities, and quota systems for jobs and schools have been instituted. However, the schools remain in poor condition, leading many Muslim families to send their children to the general public schools.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

Private schools can be opened but do not get aided with grants. They are fully self-financed (MAGHIOROS, 2010).

AUSTRIA

One of Western Europe's most developed public Islamic education programs is in Austria, where religious education at public schools is a right of recognized churches and religious communities.

Dr. Jenny Berglund explain that religious education in Austria is compulsory in public schools with an opt out option (Berglund, 2015). 13 recognized religious communities, including Islam has right to provide confessional religious education in public schools.

Curriculum for all religious courses is therefore uniform and nationally approved, and the Austrian government provides funding for instruction. This regulation and financial support guarantees that religious education in Islam is not given outside the school in a way that evades the national educational system. As a result, only two of the 1,552 private schools are Islamic schools, and they are recognized in 2005-06 by the government as running in compliance with the Austrian Private School Law.

Austria, in accordance with above, has no problems with communities developing Islamic education programs outside of state regulations if running in compliance with relevant requirements.

Courses in Islam have been offered in Austrian public schools since 1983. The Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (IGGIÖ), which established Islamic instruction in public schools, serves as the liaison between the state and public schools—organizing teachers, developing instruction (in German), and giving lessons. According to the organization, the purpose of the program is to improve students' knowledge of Islam and to encourage them to reflect upon and discuss issues related to religious identity and living as a Muslim in Austria.

Recent counts had some 37,000 children participate in Islamic education programs at 2,700 public schools across Austria, taught by 350 teachers. These numbers continue to rise. Muslim pupils at public schools do not have to attend lessons on Muslim holidays.

Finding teachers qualified to give religious instruction was found as a barrier to providing effective Islamic education in public schools.

Amidst growing Islamophobia, a proposed law in country, however, is expected to put greater restriction on Muslims as compared to Jews and Christians which will require dissolving of all their institution with becoming part of IGGIO, inability to accept foreign donations and other restrictions which are not imposed on other religious communities.

Muslim groups say the ban on foreign funding is unfair as international support is still permitted for the Christian and Jewish faiths. Turkey's head of religious affairs, Mehmet Gormez responded to this with his comment: "Austria will go back 100 years in freedom with its Islam bill," ("Austria passes controversial reforms to 1912 Islam law," 2015)

SWEDEN:

SUBJECT ON RELIGION:

In Sweden non-confessional religious education is one of a group of subjects in the core curriculum comprising history, geography, religion and civic education (Pépin, 2009, p. 26). Accordingly, teaching about religions is one of the compulsory subjects (Pépin, 2009, p. 84).

"The custom in Sweden is to organize teaching about religions not according to parents' wishes to bring their children up in their own tradition but according to the child's right to get a rounded view of different opinions and traditions. The tradition in Sweden is to show great respect for the student's own thinking and judgement" (Pépin, 2009, p. 85).

Though claimed to be 'non-confessional', we see prevalence of Christianity in this 'compulsary' course on religion.

Pépin reports following curriculum aims for this course for students to:

- To reflect on, develop and deepen their knowledge of religious, ethical and existential questions as a basis for forming their own viewpoints;

- to deepen their knowledge of *Christianity* and the other major world religions and of religious representations from other religions, as well as their knowledge of non-religious conceptions of life;
- to understand how Swedish society has been *influenced by the Bible and the Christian faith*;
- to deepen their understanding and respect for the views of other people in religious and ethical questions;
- to appreciate the value of basic ethical principles

Pepin (2009) notes:

“It seems, however, that religious education in Sweden remains imbued with Christian/Lutheran concepts and approaches and that much remains to be done to ensure that teaching is really inclusive of religious diversity. According to Von Brömssen, ‘Traditions within other faith communities are still not much recognized in schools, which gives the impression that no other faiths or festivals are part of Swedish society..’ ”.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

The great majority of Swedish students (more than 90 per cent) continue to attend state schools. In 2005/6, 8 per cent of students in compulsory education (7–16 years) and 13 percent of students in upper-secondary attended independent private schools, grant-aided by the state (*fristaende skolor*) and organized by associations, foundations, enterprises or individuals. There are 800 grant-aided independent schools in compulsory education and upper-secondary. In Sweden, 67 primary schools and six secondary schools have a religious denominational character. (Pépin, 2009, p. 83)

INDEPENDENTLY RUN CONFESSIONAL SCHOOLS:

Sweden allows for independently run confessional schools, including that of Muslim religious schools. These schools are subject to follow guidelines, including the fundamentals of democracy and all world religions.

CONTROVERSIES:

A documentary in the spring of 2003 critiquing the educational practices of the free schools generated extensive debate. The National Agency for Education investigated the situation and found little evidence of misbehavior, but some of mismanagement. It responded by increasing its oversight of the schools.

SWITZERLAND:

MUSLIM POPULATION:

According to Cultural Association for Muslim Women in Switzerland , “The number of Muslims in Switzerland has increased from 20,000 in 1970s to 50,000 in 1990s. Survey conducted in 2000 showed that the number had gone up to 310,000 representing five per cent of the total population of the country, mainly centering around Zurich” (Mussallam, 2003).

RELIGIOUSITY:

Abdeleli, (2014) mentions the following about religiosity among Muslims in Switzerland:

“Religion isn’t the most important identifying factor for many of them. According to the report, only 12-15% actively practise the faith by regularly visiting a mosque, and Muslims from the Balkan region in particular see the religion as a tradition rather than a strict belief system” (Abdeleli, 2014).

ISLAMOPHOBIA:

According to International Human Rights Report (US Department of State, 2013b):

“Minority religious groups, mostly Muslims, complained of discrimination at the local governmental level”. One of such discriminations was reported to be refusal to approve zoning applications to build mosques or establish Islamic cemeteries.

Switzerland has a fraught relationship with Islam and made international headlines in 2009 with its “anti-minaret” referendum which saw almost 60 percent of voters backing a ban on the building of such towers (“Zurich pulls plug on Islamic kindergarten - The Local,” 2015)

“There were also reports of ‘societal’ discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most incidents were directed against Muslims and Jews” (US Department of State, 2013b).

“In Wallis, a Catholic canton, an imam from Macedonia was denied a work permit

(to work as an imam in Switzerland) based in large part on the fact that the imam had studied in *Medina (Saudi Arabia)*; the cantonal authorities considered the imam a potential threat to religious peace” (Christine, 2008).

Other instances of Islamophobia include growing public aggression fueled by international events often not directly related to local Muslim population. Some of other instances quoted as ‘Islamophobic’ include ban on face veil in public, participation of Muslim girls in mandatory swimming classes, ban on male circumcision, rejection of Muslim kindergarten from fear that it was going to be ‘too Islamic’, bullying in public schools etc.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION:

“Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but municipal school authorities have some discretion in its implementation. Most public cantonal schools offer religious education, with the exception of schools in Geneva and Neuchatel. Public schools normally offer classes in Catholic and Protestant doctrines; a few schools provide instruction on other religious groups in the country. Two municipalities in the canton of Lucerne offer religious classes in Islamic doctrine. In some cantons religious classes are voluntary, while in others they form part of the mandatory curriculum; however, waivers are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Children from minority religious groups are free to attend classes for their own religious group during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by religious groups, or they may homeschool their children. A number of cantons either complement or replace traditional classes in Christian doctrines with non-confessional teachings about religion and culture.

There are no national guidelines for waivers on religious grounds from classes other than religious instruction, and practices vary”(US Department of State, 2013b).

Private religious schools can be opened in Switzerland and can receive certain amount of state funding (Matheson, Salganik, Phelps, & Perie, 1997, p. 228; OECD & Statistics, 2003, p. 87).

Supplementary schools, like many other EU countries are found in Switzerland as well offering classes on weekends or in evenings.

ISSUES FACED IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION DELIVERY:

“In Switzerland, both school education and the regulation of the relationship between church and state is a cantonal matter. Furthermore, in many cantons established churches have historically had the right to organize their religious education in public classrooms. Despite the number of Muslims living in Switzerland having grown in recent decades, the introduction of IRE-classes remains an isolated phenomenon limited to a few local experiences” (Rota & Bleisch Bouzar, 2012).

The main issue faced by Muslim community in terms of delivery of Islamic education in schools is lack of availability of qualified teachers. Development of teacher and mechanisms to achieve is still a problem to be solved. Other factors that contribute to scarcity of Islamic instruction in schools is financial instability of Muslim organizations who solely depend on donations and fear of Islamophobic reactions (J. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2013, p. 638).

CYPRUS:

POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW:

Situated in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea and to the south of Turkey, Cyprus is the largest island in the eastern Mediterranean as well as being the third smallest country in the EU, after Malta and Luxembourg.

Cyprus has remained under dispute due to elements which want to join Turkey, called Turkish Cypriots, alongside other elements which claim attachment with Greek side, known as Greek Cypriots.

This ultimately led to division of Cyprus where all Turkish Cypriots moved to north and whereas Greek Cypriots concentrated in South.

NORTHERN CYPRUS:

Northern Cyprus, officially the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is a self-declared state that comprises the northeastern portion of the island of Cyprus. Recognized only by Turkey, Northern Cyprus is considered by the international community to be part of the Republic of Cyprus. However, its administration is widely accepted as de facto administration of Northern Cyprus.(EUCC, 2013).

One of the unique features about North Cyprus is the fact that while nearly all Turkish Cypriots are adherents of the Islamic faith, they favor a secular state (Emilianides, 2005).

Current government in Northern Cyprus, unlike its predecessor, is more inclined toward unification with south and restricting Turkish involvement and its pro-Islamic Agenda (Kyriss, 2015). In line with

this secular approach, any effort to infuse Islamic culture faces strong opposition, for instance first Islamic theological college in Northern Hala Sultan (KP DAILY NEWS, 2014; World Bulletin, 2013).

Accordingly, there is not much thirst for Islamic education among most of the Northern Cypriots.

SOUTHERN CYPRUS:

On the Southern side, there are hardly any Muslims.

DENMARK:

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

From study conducted by Llorent-Bedmar & Cobano-Delgado (2014) we come to know the following:

- In Denmark, during the period of compulsory education (folkeskole) which spans the ages from 6 to 16, religious education is designated a compulsory subject and is called “Christian Studies” in line with state’s support for church in terms of moral and financial support .
- In the first and sixth years it consists of 60 hours’ classroom attendance, while it is 30 hours in the rest, with the exception of the preparation-for-confirmation year, usually the seventh, in which the subject is not taught.
- In secondary education between the ages of 16 and 19, religious education is also a compulsory subject. It is anticipated that pupils’ parents can ask for exemption. An alternative is offered in a very small number of schools (only 41 of the 3,171 primary schools).

‘Christian studies’ subject has traditionally been taught on an Evangelical Lutheran basis, with the addition of elements about other religions including Islam. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from Christian studies on religious grounds, and some Muslim parents do so.

Muslim organizations have suggested that there should be cooperation between the education ministry and their organizations in Islamic curriculum development, but as of this writing, this had not yet taken place.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark, n.d.)

Public system allows for groups of parents to establish ‘independent schools’ which are entitled to state subsidies to cover most of their budget (up to 80%).

The first Muslim independent school was established in 1978. In 2006-2007, there were 22 independent Muslim primary schools with a total of approximately 3,600 pupils, all with Muslim backgrounds. Many of the independent schools offer Arabic and Islamic studies.

A study carried out by the Ministry of Education in 2006 found that a high percentage (41%) of the pupils in Muslim independent schools progressed into upper secondary school, against a national

average of 26%.
FUNDING:

There are 18 Islamic schools in Denmark, about half of which are located in Copenhagen, and state funding covers up to 60 percent of the schools' expenses. Parents pay the remainders of the schools' costs each month.

In 2002, the requirements for private school state funding were amended to ensure funded schools prepare students to "live in a society characterized by freedom and democracy." Regulation and supervision were also increased, and private schools were required to hew more closely to the public school curriculum. This caused protests among independent schools.

SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION:

Most mosques and Muslim associations provide some form of Islamic instruction outside school hours.

NORWAY:

MUSLIM DEMOGRAPHICS:

Islam is the second largest religion in Norway after various forms of Christianity, with 132,135 Muslims present in the country ("Religious communities and life stance communities, 1 January 2014," 2014).

The majority of Muslims in Norway are Sunni, with a significant Shia minority.

The biggest group of immigrant Muslims in Norway come from Pakistan, followed by Turks and Moroccans (Aslan, 2009, p. 302).

ORGANIZATION OF MUSLIMS:

Though most Muslim organizations in Norway have remained ethnic-based, the trend is gradually changing with formation of Muslim youth and student organizations, women organization and Islamic council of Norway – all working without consideration to ethnic origins (Aslan, 2009, p. 304)

RELIGIOSITY:

There is a high level of polarization in terms of religiosity among Muslim in Norway.

In a research survey, 27% of Muslims responded that they attended religious ceremonies monthly or more frequently with other Muslims. 31% said that they never attend such events.

SCHOOLING OPTIONS:

Private schools:

From J. S. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, Maréchal, & Moe (2009, pp. 260–261), we come to know that there are very few private schools in Norway reflecting success of 'one school for all' policy (only 2.2% children go to private schools).

Government provides substantial funding for private schools but has strict criteria regarding who can establish private schools and why. Religious organizations are allowed to open private schools. Most private schools are run by minority faith groups, however, there was only 1 Islamic school reported to be operating in 2003-2004 (Lauglo, 2010).

Compulsory Subject on Religion in Public Schools:

In 1997, a school subject “Christianity, Religion and Philosophies of Life” (KRL) was made compulsory for all children to attend. Many parent complained about its strong tilt towards Christianity against their will. This got escalated to an extent that it was discussed in the UN Human Rights Committee, and then being redefined as Religion, Philosophies of life and Ethics (RLE) with new rules governing exemptions (Götke & Nissen, 2012).

SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

From Aslan (2009), we come to know the following:

- Most mosques operate some form of Quranic schools with some of them teaching formal curricula spanning across a number of various subjects.
- Some of these supplementary schools offer classes in evenings whereas other operate on weekends and include some socializing activities as well. Some schools lend help with home-work as well.
- Quite a reasonable population of Muslim children attend such schools.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN COUNTRIES WITH LESS THAN 100,000 MUSLIM POPULATION

ROMANIA

Islam in Romania is followed by a minority these days, but has 700 years of tradition in Northern Dobruja, a region on the Black Sea coast which was part of the Ottoman Empire for almost five centuries (ca. 1420-1878). In present-day Romania, most adherents to Islam belong to the Tatar and Turkish ethnic communities and follow the Sunni doctrine.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CURRICULUM:

RE is a part of the curricula domain "Human beings and Society". The RE syllabuses have a confessional character and are organized according to a scheme that is given by the Ministry of Education.

The legal status of this discipline offers to all students, in pre-university education, the opportunity to attend RE classes, having the freedom, according to the Constitution, to attend or not these classes (“Romania - International Religious Freedom Report,” 2005).

Education Law no. 84/1995 stipulates that RE teaching in primary education is compulsory, optional in secondary school and elective in high school and vocational schools. There is one hour of RE per week.(Tomoioaga, 2009)

The decision to opt out is rare, because 99% of the population belongs to a confession or a religion.

For each new school year, parents choose which confessional RE their child will attend and this does not have to be their own confession.

DELIVERY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

All confessions and religious communities that are accredited by the state are eligible for state support; they have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools, receive government funds to build religious places, pay clergy salaries with state funds and subsidize clergy's housing expenses, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, and enjoy tax-exempt status ("Romania - International Religious Freedom Report," 2005).

Islam is one of the 18 recognized religions/ cults in the country (Aslan, 2009, p. 398).

REPORTS AND ISSUES RELATED TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

From US State Government's International Religious Freedom Report, we find out following reports/ cases of discrimination in religious education:

- While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, some minority recognized religious groups complain that they were unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools.
- According to minority religious groups, the local inspectors for religion classes are typically Orthodox priests who deny accreditation to teachers of other religions.
- In some cases, school directors denied access in their schools to teachers of certain religions.
- Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion.
- It was also reported that at some festivities in public schools, all students, irrespective of their religious affiliation, must attend Orthodox religious services.

According to Leşcu & Demirgian (2014):

"Taught in Romanian schools throughout the undergraduate years, religion as a school subject has come under criticism from both some of the parents and part of civil society, on grounds of the freedom of religious belief. There are parents who do not want their children to take religion classes because they belong to a different religion than that being taught in schools, or because they do not hold religious beliefs or simply because they think certain parts of the textbooks may have a negative impact on their children.

Many parents, however, are not sure whether the law allows them to withdraw their children from religious education lessons or how this can be done."

SECULARISM AMONG YOUNGER GENERATION:

There is a high level of secularism in younger generation which causes divide and tension between them and the previous generation which believes that they have cut off from the religion and values they belong to (Aslan, 2009).

ONLINE ISLAMIC SCHOOL:

Muslim community opened an online Islamic school in Romania in 2009 in order to serve Muslim community living at various geographical locations ("Online Islam School for Romania Muslims," 2009). Muslim converts and some Muslim organizations are found to be actively engaged in Dawah work (Górak-Sosnowska, 2011, p. 269).

SLOVENIA

Muslims comprise of 2.4% of Slovenian population however, some researchers argue that actual number could possibly be higher due to certain factors in which survey was conducted (Aslan, 2009, p. 475).

OVERVIEW OF RE:

Ivanc (2010) highlights following perspective about education in Slovenia:

- Up until today 99% of all schools in Slovenia are public schools. With regard to elementary schools there are only three private schools (the Waldorf School and two catholic schools) among 802 elementary compulsory public schools. There are also six private and 158 public upper secondary schools.
- According to the Education Act, religious communities may establish kindergartens and schools under the same conditions as other private-law subjects. Private educational institutions may be financed in two ways: they are either granted licenses or financed directly under statute. In order to receive a licence the private school or kindergarten has to include itself in the public network and execute only a public programme. Non-licensed private kindergartens, private elementary and music schools and private general secondary schools (but not also professional schools), which carry out public programmes and comply with statutory conditions, have the right to public funds to the extent of 85% of the funds that the State or local community designate for salaries and material costs per student in public schools.
- According to constitution denominational activities are not permitted in public kindergartens and schools or in licensed kindergartens and schools. Such denominational activities include religious lessons or denominational religious lessons aimed at raising students in that religion, lessons in which a religious community decides on the substance, textbooks, teachers' education and the suitability of individual teachers for teaching and organized religious rites.
- The legislator's approach of ensuring only negative neutrality in public (and also in private) schools was heavily inspired by the idea of strict or negative *Läicité* (ideological secularism) and its negative perception of religion.
- Non-confessional religious and ethics education is provided as an optional subject. Religious communities have no involvement in contents for this course.

The non-confessional religious subject is not expected to fulfill religious and spiritual needs of Muslim community due to the manner in which information, very brief in nature, is presented e.g. description of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as “inventor” of Islamic faith.(Aslan, 2009, p. 486)

Laws allow religious communities to establish private Islamic schools but Islamic community in Slovenia does not have human and financial resources to be able to start such venture (Aslan, 2009, p. 490).

There are many confessional weekend schools running in the country which provide classes on weekend and one weekday evening (Aslan, 2009, p. 488). Number of attendees is encouraging.

CROATIA

In the Croatian educational system in the 1990s, religious education of all confessions became a part of the Croatian school curriculum, where education legislative permits confessional religious education in preschool, primary and secondary education, as an elective subject.

Some studies indicate that around 87% of primary and 80% of secondary school students take the course every school year (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In public school, a minimum number of 7 minority religion students willing to attend RE is required for teaching to be organized. If number is lesser, option is available for teaching through religious community (US Senate - Committee on Foreign Relations, 2005, p. 310).

In line with majority religious affiliation, Catholic church has a strong presence in educational system. Catholic priests sit in committees for approving the history textbooks with which they are enforcing their religious views and religion therefore has a significant position in the education Croatian pupils receive (Topić, 2012).

There are religious pre-schools in country but no religious primary school. There are 10 catholic grammar schools and 2 secondary schools of other religions (Marinović-Jerolimov, 2005) with one known to have affiliation with Islamic community.

This secondary school is running at its full capacity and Muslim community, though small and dispersed across the country, has shown aims to establish higher education institution at one end and offer Islamic kindergarten classes in Zargeb mosques at the other hand (US Senate - Committee on Foreign Relations, 2005, pp. 310–311).

Only Catholic schools are fully funded by the state. The others receive only partial funding: although there is no official regulation on this, the Ministry argues that a number of at least 150 pupils is needed to apply for full public funding (Topić, 2012).

IRELAND

Education in Ireland is generally segregated on the basis of religion and supports the concept of faith specific schools causing lesser opposition to creation of Islamic schools, unlike most of the other European countries (Aslan, 2009, p. 204).

The Catholic Church runs more than 90 percent of all public schools. Other religious groups operate another 6 percent (Schrunk, 2013). Parents accordingly report lack of availability of non-Catholic schools in many communities, as reported by Schrunk.

The Irish Constitution states in Article 42.1. “The State acknowledges that the primary educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.”

State accordingly guarantees parents right to choose religious education for their children.

“Irish primary schools are essentially publicly funded, but privately run. The government pays for school construction; teacher salaries and grants based on school enrollment, but private groups—mostly required to teach a standard state curriculum, and 30 minutes per day is set aside for religious instruction. For the vast majority of children who attend Catholic schools, that means preparation for Communion and Confirmation is part of the state-sanctioned school day—an unwelcome reality for some parents” (Schrunk, 2013).

Muslim community in line with their constitutional right to receive state support, have found Irish educational system to be very supportive and positive.

First Muslim school in Ireland was established in Dublin after a series of meeting with government officials and community engagement. Government throughout the process remained very supportive and was duly appreciated by Muslim community. School opened its doors in 1990 with 41 children and since then, has expanded rapidly. In 1993, due to high number of enrollments, school building became inadequate.

FINLAND:

Compared to many other European countries the current Muslim population in Finland is relatively small—40–45,000 persons or approximately 0.8% of Finland’s 5.4 million inhabitants.

Dr. Jenny Berglund explains religious education situation in Finland as follows:

In Finland, religious education (RE) is a compulsory school subject in both comprehensive (7–16 years) and upper-secondary school (16–18/19 years).

The Finnish RE model enables pupils to follow the religious education of their own denomination.

In 2004 Finnish RE was changed from a confessional to a non-confessional school subject taught “in accordance with the pupil’s own religion.” This categorical change also has been described as “weak confessional,” with “confessional” referring to the fact that both the pupils in the classroom and the curriculum reflect a common worldview.

Whereas Lutheran Religious Education (LRE) is taught in all schools, alternate RE is offered only if the municipality or town contains a minimum of three pupils that are members of one of Finland’s registered religions, and if parents demand that religious education in their specific tradition be offered to their children.

Those that desire general RE not connected to any particular religion are given the option of a course in “Ethics”—a subject that is arguably more neutral, but that can include teaching about religion.

Currently there are 13 registered religious education curricula in Finland’s comprehensive schools and ten such curricula in its upper secondary schools.

Muslim students in Finland are to receive Islamic religious education (IRE) within the state school system with a non-confessional curriculum, meaning that the IRE orientation in public schools is educational rather than religious.

According to the Finnish National Board of Education, experiential forms of learning and ways of familiarizing students with different forms of religious practice are needed, but all learning activities are to be enacted on established pedagogical grounds.

According to the new comprehensive IRE curricula, the purpose of IRE is to strengthen the pupil’s Islamic identity and their understanding of the significance of Islam for themselves and for society. Students are also taught to understand and interact with persons holding different worldviews, something that is stressed in all Finnish RE curricula.

Recent research on IRE in Finland indicates that the country’s model safeguards the rights of Muslim minorities and significantly contributes to the development of a Muslim identity. It also encourages Muslim students’ commitment to and participation in Finnish society.

In her study of IRE in Finland, Finnish researcher Inkeri Rissanen has shown that IRE teachers are deeply involved in developing a representation of Islam appropriate for a liberal educational context, and that pedagogical and ideological negotiations are prioritized over theological differences in decisions on this matter.

She has also shown that, due to their ability to identify with both groups, IRE teachers sometimes serve as cultural interpreters in practical discussions between immigrant Muslim families and school personnel.

Rissanen notes that teachers manage the sometimes problematic diversity of interpretations of Islam by focusing on aspects that are shared by most Muslims. However, this is also sometimes challenging due to parents’ diverse cultural backgrounds. Muslim parents and pupils viewed the existence of IRE as recognition of Islam in Finnish society and acknowledgement of Muslim identities in Finnish schools.

Rissanen concludes that providing religious education that is in keeping with the students’ religion supports integration by affording religious traditions a tangible role in education—i.e., religious persons are integrated not only as individuals but also as a part of the country’s institutional infrastructure.

In Finland, there are almost no private schools except a handful of religiously affiliated ones which provide state-sponsored education as well (Vasagar, 2010).

PORTUGAL

MUSLIM POPULATION:

According to PEW research 2010, number of Muslims in Portugal is around 30,000. However, other more recent sources claim this number to be between 48,000 to 55,000 (Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2014, p. 517) in which around 8000 are Ismailia (an extreme shia sect).

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM:

Country upholds principle of religious freedom and changes to law in 2006 have enabled Muslim organizations to function in a more stable manner.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION:

From study conducted by Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, we find out the following:

- Until the 1980s the transmission of religious ideas was mainly a family responsibility. They would be helped by private tutors who would organize informal collective classes to teach the recitation of the Qur'an, ethics, and ritual aspects (teaching how to pray, for instance).
- With the creation of the main mosques in Almada, Odivelas and Lisbon, religious education became increasingly institutionalized. Currently, most mosques and prayer halls organize public Islamic instruction classes on weekends. Mosque provides instruction in the language of majority of local community e.g. Bangla in some instances.
- Mosques also organize Islamic education summer programmes
- The Law of Religious Freedom allows Islamic instruction in public schools, depending on the number of pupils/parents who require it (minimum ten). In practice, there is currently no public school in Portugal with enough Muslim pupils of more or less the same age who could benefit from this offer. The parents do not complain about the lack of such service, as their children attend the instruction in the Qur'anic classes.
- A recognized, private secondary Islamic school exists in Palmela (in Lisbon metropolitan area). It has 200 pupils, with nearly 10% of them being non-Muslims and it runs both a secular and a religious curricula. In 2009, it achieved the status of being the best school in the national ranking of public and private secondary schools. According to Tiesler & Cairns (2007), school also offers primary education. Part of the tuition fees for this school can be deducted in taxes, depending on the family income, and, as of 2011, the school is part of the Cambridge International Curriculum.
- Classes and education is not only restricted to Islamic education but other subject areas such as alphabetisation, language classes (Portuguese or, in the case of children e.g. from Guinea Conakry, French) and general capacity training (computer courses etc.). These classes not only benefit children but also recent adult migrants and accordingly play their role in improved societal integration.
- Informal and mosque institutions are also run by Ismaili sect
- Another educational institution is the Darul'ulum Kadria-Ashrafijia de Odivelas which is part of the Association for the Islamic Education in Portugal. It reproduces a South Asian Sufism inspired version of Islam, namely Barelvia.

LUXEMBOURG

“Luxembourg does not have an Established Church; and Articles 19 & 20 of the Constitution guarantee freedom of religion and of public worship and declare that no-one may be obliged to participate in the acts and ceremonies of a religion or to observe its days of rest. However, Article 106 provides that “The salaries and pensions of ministers of religion shall be borne by the State and regulated by the law”. In order to qualify for state funding, a religious group must establish an official and stable representative body with which the Government can interact” (Cranmer & Pocklington, 2015).

MUSLIM DEMOGRAPHICS:

Muslim minority population statistics vary according to various reports¹ and some estimates suggest that numbers up to 10,000 people.

However, Islam is now the second religion in Luxembourg, after Catholicism. There are currently five mosques in Luxembourg: Mamer (which is also home to the Islamic cultural centre), Niederkorn, Esch-sur-Alzette, Wiltz and Bonnevoie in Luxembourg City and (Wort Newspaper, 2014b).

According to reports, a series of lectures in public schools was organized by Government through a Muslim scholar to avoid negative reactions after acts of terrorism in America (which were clearly marked as un-Islamic by majority of Muslim scholars including the lecturer). This is reported to have resulted in positive change of general perception about Islam and Muslims. (EUMC, 2001)

LOWER EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS:

“Luxembourg ranked last in public education among all OECD countries according to the last two reports from OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Both reports emphasized the selective character of Luxembourgian education and its socially unjust character, which exacerbates social inequalities instead of reducing them. The result is an excessive number of failures. Indeed, at the age of 15, half of children will have repeated a class at least once. Part of the problem is also due to Luxembourg's trilingual instruction. Proficiency in Luxembourgian, German, and French—all three languages are used in the education system—is required for graduation from secondary school, but half the students leave school without a certified qualification. Often, Luxembourgian children, whose mother tongue is Luxembourgian, a German dialect, encounter difficulties in French, whereas the children of immigrants often fail German-language courses. Since German courses are based on an extensive knowledge of Luxembourgian, which foreign children often do not have, they face a structural disadvantage.” (Kollwelter, 2007)

FUTURE OF RE IN SCHOOLS:

In recent times, state is distancing itself from religion and moving more toward secular French model.

Iona Institute of Religion and Society (2015) describes current plan as follows:

“Luxembourg is to ban religious education in State schools irrespective of the wishes of parents. The move in the Catholic majority country will see religion classes in schools replaced with lessons on ethics and morals, to include classes on world religions.

¹ It is illegal for Government to obtain religious statistics since 1979 (“RECUEIL DE LEGISLATION - Service central de législation,” 1979)

The shift, which has been compared to a move towards the secular French model between church and state, comes as a result of a new funding agreement drawn up between the government and faith groups. Under this, state subsidies once paid to established religions will end or be curtailed. Luxembourg will continue to pay stipends towards supporting currently serving priests, for example, but will offer no future payments to clerics now in formation.”

Recognition of Muslim Community and its potential role in future of RE in Schools:

Muslim organizations were previously not included in this stipend payment scheme but have recently been included (Cranmer & Pocklington, 2015).

We get further details on this from information presented by Wort (2015):

- “Luxembourg's Muslim Community has spoken of its joy at having the Islamic faith recognised in Luxembourg after a 17-year struggle, calling it the "dawn of a new era"
- Government has reformed its faith group subsidies and approved funding for Muslims for the first time.
- “The Shoura, representative body of the Muslim community in Luxembourg, mentioned in their January 2015 press release: "By this act, the Shoura has finally obtained the recognition of the Muslim faith after a seventeen year struggle. From this day on, the Muslim faith will be placed on equal footing with the other major world religions recognised by Luxembourg.”
- It means that Luxembourg's Muslims will become part of the “Conseil des Cultes Conventionnés”, a body representing recognised faith groups in Luxembourg. “This body will take part in defining the curriculum for a new common subject to be introduced in schools known as “an education to ethics”. Thus, there arises an opportunity for Muslims to work together with other religions, allowing them to get to know one another better, as well as a chance to make Islam better known and understood”

PRIVATE SCHOOLING

Public and private secondary schools are harmonized and law provides state subsidies for private schools, in return for allowing the state to supervise their curricula and their teachers' qualifications (Hansen, 1997, p. 19).

The government subsidizes all private religious schools affiliated with a parent religion that has a signed a convention with the state (“LUXEMBOURG,” 2012).

CZECH

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE:

Dr. Emily O'Dell, a renowned educationalist, defined religiosity in Czech Republic as follows (Emily Jane O'Dell, 2011):

“Czech Republic is frequently referred to as the most atheistic country in the world. In fact, widespread atheism is what some fear make the Czechs and Slovaks ripe for conversion to Islam, while others fear that the prevalence of atheism in these countries provides a fertile breeding ground

for Islamophobia, due to widespread antipathy for religion as a whole—not just necessarily for Islam.”

MUSLIM COMMUNITY:

According to some estimates, there are around 20,000 Muslims in Czech. Most of Muslims in Republic are highly educated and work in professional fields such as medicine and engineering (Emily Jane O’Dell, 2011).

Czech Muslims face a lot of discrimination at various levels in society.

CZECH Republic, in line with second opinion mentioned above from Dr. Emily O’Dell, is known for its wide-spread Islamophobia at state level and all the way down with numerous instances making their way to international news (Cameron, 2015; Emily Jane O’Dell, 2011; Pitt, 2014).

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

“The Czech education system is jointly managed by the central government, the 14 regions, which enjoy considerable autonomy, and the local communities. The latter are responsible for school education (compulsory education from 6 to 15 years – Základní škola); they set up the schools and administer them. The head of the school is responsible for the quality of education in the school and for financial management. He or she hires and fires the teachers. The government fixes the main objectives of the education system and its general content, along with the competences to be acquired. These are defined in the Framework Education Programme, which serves as a reference to the schools for the development of their own programmes; it is responsible for teacher-training and the School Register. A school, whether state or private, is only constituted after it has been added to the Register”.(Pépin, 2009, pp. 60–61)

RELIGION IN SCHOOLS:

Following are some of the key points from information on Czech republic’s RE provided by Pépin (2009):

- “Teaching about religions in state schools is at two levels: a distinction has to be made between teaching about religions and confessional religious education”
- Teaching about religions, or about knowledge of religions, takes the same approach as in France with the teaching of religious facts, and is integrated into the various compulsory disciplines, mainly history, geography, civic education and intercultural education, defined in the Framework Programme for Basic Education adopted in 2007. Its target is knowledge, not beliefs (non-confessional).
- Confessional religious education has optional status. It is taught outside the time allotted to compulsory and optional subjects. With this status, the time allotted to the subject depends on each head teacher. Lessons in religion are no more than one hour a week.
- Making use of the specific rights they have been granted, the churches and religious associations organize religious education in state schools. The different confessions are responsible for the content and quality of this education and organize the registration of students. There must be at

least seven students interested before a course can be set up (this can consist of students from different year groups, and several schools can group together as long as the number in the group is no greater than 30 students). It is the head teacher's responsibility to ensure that all the conditions for setting up such a course are met.

ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

An effort was made in 2012 to introduce Islam to Czech children in the spirit of promoting multiculturalism, inclusiveness and tolerance. The project received support from the Czech Education Ministry and while it was voluntary, schools were expected to make wide use of it in promoting a greater understanding of foreign cultures (Freeman, 2012). However, Education minister faced pressure from right-wing Islamophobic activists and accordingly withdrew support from project leaving public system void of any specific information on Islam. However, under the new Czech framework programme for basic education, adopted in 2007, Islam is touched upon under the subject "knowledge of religions" (Pépin, 2009, p. 24).

Religious schools, including Islamic one, can receive government's financial support to a limited extent (Pépin, 2009, p. 24).

REPUBLIC ESTONIA

From research by Kiviorg (2010) we note:

- Religious following in Estonia is very low as compared to other European states (29% in year 2000)
- "The Estonian school system consists mainly of state and municipal schools. Thus, the primary place for religious education is in public schools. Religious education in Estonia is a voluntary, non-confessional (non-denominational) subject. As to the typology of RE, it is intended to be a mix of teaching about religions and ethics".
- Confessional religious education is provided for children by Sunday schools and church schools operated by congregations. Religious organizations can set up private educational institutions. Such schools do not need a license.
- Number of schools providing option religious education or a related subject is very low. Schools are required to provide religious education subject if at least 15 students demand it.

There is no alternative subject to RE for the pupils who don't attend the RE classes to gain knowledge or become informed about world religions and ethics.

From ENAR report on racism in Estonia, we find out:

- "According to some estimates, there were around 4500 Muslims in Estonia in 2010 with a few hundred of them being practicing".
- "Registration of religious groups is regulated by the Churches and Congregations Act and is carried out through the courts. Formal registration is mandatory. It allows the religious group to conduct marriages with civil validity, to benefit from tax exemptions and to establish private schools"

- “Estonian Muslims established their own premises in 2009, purchased with money from a Saudi sponsor. The centre hosts an Islamic cultural centre Turath, library, room for lectures, prayer room and office of the Imam. Several smaller centres are located in Tallinn and also nearby Maardu. Some years ago there were discussions about the construction of a mosque in Tallinn, but permission was not granted”.

SLOVAKIA

Religious education is provided in public schools by officially registered religious organizations. However, Muslims are not registered due to certain legislative conditions which exclude them from this right and hence there is no Islamic education in public schools (J. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2014b, p. 543).

According to some estimates, the number of Muslims in country is up to 0.2% (PEW Research Centre, 2012) or approximately 10,000.

“The country remains the only European Union member state without a single mosque. It is difficult to determine the exact number, since Islam is not registered by the state as a recognized religion in Slovakia. The Muslim community here includes both foreign and domestic believers. In 2007, the Slovak parliament changed the law so that at least 20,000 members are required for recognition. This is impossible for a Muslim community of 5,000 people.” (“Muslim community believes, even without mosque,” 2013)

Several applications were made for building of mosques but none of them could be successful. According to reports, land was already purchased for mosques which was also supposed to house a primary Islamic school. But according to our literature review, the construction could not be started due to various opposing factors.(“First mosque planned for Slovakia,” 2014, “The Phobia of New Things,” 2000)

In recent times as well, Slovakia has continued to show a very unwelcoming approach towards Islam. One such instance was refusal to accept Muslim migrants with the justification that the country has no mosques. (Masroor, 2015; RT News, 2015; “‘We have no mosques’ Slovakia says it prefers Christian refugees,” 2015)

A preference is given to Christian migrants though the constitution requires anti-discriminatory approach based on religion.

The Council of Europe Secretary-General, Thorbjorn Jagland, called for the Slovakian government’s policy to be reversed.

“Refusing refugees on the grounds of their religion would be a blatant discrimination. Especially, during this unprecedented refugee crisis, there must be no place for xenophobia and discrimination. Europe must show solidarity with these vulnerable people,” Jagland said in a statement.

POLAND

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE:

Poland is conventionally perceived as one of the most religious countries in contemporary Europe.

Poland is overwhelming Christian majority and it is believed that “In a nation that’s more than 90 percent Roman Catholic, it’s hard to be different. Some argue that it’s even harder because of a new Education Ministry policy that expands the teaching of religion in public schools.”(Myers, 1992)

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS:

According to the Constitution, all religious groups have equal rights in Poland; however, there are differences in regulations concerning the legal position of the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations. The legal position of the former is regulated by the international agreement between the Polish state and the Holy See. The legal position of other religious organizations can be regulated by signing bilateral agreements with the Polish state. In practice, only 14 historical religions have such separate acts. The legal status of other religious organizations functioning legally in Poland is regulated by registration with the Register of Churches and Other Denominations, on the basis of conditions stipulated in the Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief. Currently there are 157 religious organizations of various sizes and diverse religious traditions recorded in the Registry (Zielin’ska & Zwierzdzyński, 2013).

CHRISTIANITY STUDIES IN STATE SCHOOLS:

In 1990s, Church utilized its influence on state in attempting to impose Christian values and norms on the entire society as well as for intervening in the political and public affairs of the newly constructed democratic state (Zielin’ska & Zwierzdzyński, 2013). A part of this effort was introduction of Christian education in state schools.

Some believe that, “Although unwanted by most parents, Catholic Religious Education (catechism) has been inserted stepwise into Polish state schools. In June 2010 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that this violated religious freedom” (“Creeping evangelisation in state schools,” 2013).

ALTERNATE TO CHRISTIANITY STUDIES:

Concordat Watch claims that alternate to this Christian teaching, “Ethics” is either unavailable at many places or taught by priests.

A recent controversy arose when a priest shows ISIS beheading video in religious education class which left many children in highly stressful state (Wyborcza, 2015).

PARENTS’ CHOICE REGARDING CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION:

According to Article 53 of constitution, parents have the right to religious and moral upbringing and teaching of their children in accordance with their convictions.

All religious organizations officially recognized by the state have the right to organize R.E. in schools, under the condition that schooling does not violate other people’s freedom of religion and conscience.

State does not generally interfere with curricula offered which is considered an internal matter of religious organizations which can run schools and seminaries under certain legal obligations and provisions.

Private (non-public) schools, mostly fee based, can regulate their religious education classes and curricula with little or no influence from state (Zielin´ska & Zwierzdzyński, 2013).

MUSLIM COMMUNITY AND ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION:

Though there is very little formal organization of Muslims working on religious education in a systematic manner, one significant effort was formation of Islamic studies curriculum for teaching in schools (generally offered on Sundays at limited places) initiated by Imams and teachers in liaison with Mufti of Poland ("ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN POLAND," 2015).

According to Muslim Center in Kraków (2014):

Muslims in Poland are a very small minority. Today the approximate statistics of the Muslim population in Poland are as follows:

Tatars – 5.000

Foreign Muslims – 25.000

New Polish Muslims – between 500 and 1.000.

Most of the remaining Tatar Muslims have very limited understanding of religion, mainly due to the lack of Islamic educational establishments. The two old Tatar mosques are used mostly for Eid festivals and cultural gatherings rather than day to day worship and educational activities.

The reestablishment of Islamic activities began through the contact with Muslims coming mostly from the Arab world. The first active group that started serious da'wah work were the students. In 1989 they formed the "Muslim Students Society in Poland". Amongst other things they established some elementary Islamic education for the Tatar children.

However *there aren't any Imams or scholars who would have good knowledge of Islam*, the Polish language and who would have understanding of the broader Polish society.

There is no formal Muslim educational institution. However there is some informal Islamic education for children in many cities. The number of participants varies from 40 to 150 persons, with the greatest number in Białystok and the surrounding area.

Sunni Muslims lack organizational representation in the country and only 2 out of 5 registered Muslim organizations are Sunni (Górak-Sosnowska, 2011, p. 189).

Muslim organizations can legally accept foreign donations. However, such donations are not very frequently provided to them and despite number of Muslims claimed to be approximately 20000, only 1 mosque could be built in 20th century.

HUNGARY

Religious education is an optional subject in public schools. Hungary is a secular state and requires schools to be neutral in religious and world views issues but provide space for religious education.

From US State Government report (US Department of State, 2012), we find out that registered churches and religious associations in Hungary have the right to provide religious education in public schools if requested by students or parents. Religious instruction is not part of the curriculum in public schools, but the government permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extracurricular religious education classes.

Everything beyond provision of space for conducting religious education is domain of churches or recognized religious organizations. They are responsible for the syllabuses, textbooks, content of teaching, training and employment of teachers, supervision, examinations, announcements, registration etc.

Confessional RE, as discussed, is taught is an optional (Marianna, 2006) and alternative, 'Ethics' is supposed to be provided for those who opt out (MTI, 2012).

Optional religious instruction is usually held after the normal school day and taught in school facilities by representatives of various religious groups. The four "historic" churches provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. Private schools are not obligated to provide religious education. Religious organizations can also make agreements with governments to run state schools based on certain conditions. The Roman Catholic Church took over 63 institutions, the Reformed Church 34, the Baptist Church (and Hungarian Baptist Aid) 32, the Lutheran Church eight, and other religious groups 10. At year's end, churches operated 850 of the country's 10,233 public education institutions (approximately 8 percent).

However, this arrangement requires designated religious group to be able to collect the signatures of at least 50 percent of the parents and adult students (US Department of State, 2012). With Muslims being a very small minority, it seems to be a problem and there are no fulltime public schools run by Muslim organizations according to our knowledge.

From an interview with one of the Muslim organization leaders (Timea, 2015) we come to know that most of the Muslims in Hungary, mainly concentrated around Budapest belong to lower income sector of community and mosques/ weekend schools find it difficult to finance their activities based on limited donations. We observed a similar trend related to financial difficulties for Muslim organizations from other sources as well.

Muslims, however, have their representation in list of approved religious organizations in country. Parents are also keen to get their children education in Islam. Budapest masjid is reported to teach 200 pupils currently and also offers special vacation courses.

LATVIA

The Ecclesiastical Council in Latvia comments on religious issues for the government. The council is an advisory body chaired by the prime minister. It includes representatives from major religious groups: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Baptist, Adventist, Old Believers, Methodist, and Jewish. Only traditional organizations are represented on the council, limiting the input of other religious organizations into government decisions on religious matters. By law "traditional" religious groups enjoy certain rights and privileges that "nontraditional" groups do not. Religion-specific laws define relations between the state and each of the traditional religious groups.

NON-CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION:

All schools in Latvia are required to offer a choice between a non-confessional course, “Christian Faith,” and a course in “Ethics” in grades 1 through 4. They also can offer a non-confessional course, “Christian Ethics,” as an alternative to secular “Ethics” in grade 7 and an elective course, “History of Religions,” in high school. However, students are not required to study religion in any grade, provided they study ethics in elementary school and grade 7 (Filipsone, 2005).

TEACHER TRAINING:

Teachers can acquire certification to teach religion and ethics at the Professional Program of Teachers of Religion and Ethics at the Faculty of Theology, University of Latvia. However, teachers of the course “Christian Faith” still have to be approved by their churches. (Filipsone, 2005).

ISSUES RELATED TO CONFESSIONISM:

Despite non-confessional education in constitution, confessionism is still strong in Latvia, with mainline churches seeking to consolidate their identities after 50 years of forced atheism under communist rule.

VARIATIONS:

Even though there has been certain progress in the field of religious education due to increased governmental support, in reality, the existence and form of religious education in a public school are still highly dependent on the attitude of its administration. It is still possible for principals to influence the decision of parents of elementary school students in favor of ethics, as well as to choose to offer the electives, “Christian Ethics” and “History of Religions.” This situation allows for a wide range of experience with religious education in different schools: in some of them religious education flourishes, in some it barely exists, and in others it is completely ignored.

ARRANGEMENTS IF STUDENTS PREFER CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION:

The law stipulates that only representatives of traditional Christian churches (i.e., Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox Christian, Old Believer, Baptist, Methodist, and Adventist) and Jewish groups may teach religion in public schools to public school students who volunteer to take the classes. The government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on a voluntary basis on the religion “characteristic of the national minority.” Other denominations and religious groups that do not have their own state-supported minority schools may provide religious education only in private schools. Depending on the grade level, courses can range from sectarian instruction with Church-approved instructors to nondenominational Christian teachings to overviews of major world religions. Parents can register their children for nonreligious ethics classes instead of Christian-based courses.

MUSLIM COMMUNITY:

Muslim community in Latvia, a small minority, maintains low profile to avoid xenophobia against them (Poljarevic, 2009).

“Despite the not so favorable setting in Latvia, the Muslim community is continuing to expand. Currently, the estimated numbers of Muslims in the country range from five to ten thousands. Seven existing Muslim congregations (five in the capital and two in other smaller cities) are united under the

Latvian Muslim Organizations Association. In the recent years, Muslims have been working on obtaining the permission to build the first purpose-built mosque in Latvia. The translation of the Quran from Arabic into Latvian also is on the way. Looking at the general scene of Islam in today's Latvia, I am happy to see young, eager minds, who are ready to prove to the quite prejudiced locals that Islam is also for Latvians."(Brence, 2012)

Like other European countries, we find small but very active Ahmaddiya community in Latvia as well which is pursuing to convert Muslim and non-Muslim population to their religion through ventures such as translating Quran in Latvian (Poljarevic, 2009). Orthodox Muslim scholars have highlighted errors and deceptions in Ahmadi translations (Al-Munajjid, 2007; Kidwai, 2000).

LITHUANIA

In Lithuania the education is mostly public (taxpayer-funded) with private or religious facilities being an exception.

MUSLIM POPULATION:

There were almost 3000 Muslims in Lithuania during the 2001 census, or some 0.1% of population (*Sunni Islam in Lithuania*, 2012).

LEGAL PROVISIONS:

We come to know about relevant legislation related to religious education through UNESCO (UNESCO, 1992):

- Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion shall not be restricted.
- Every person shall have the right to freely choose any religion or faith and, either individually or with others, in public or in private, to manifest his or her religion or faith in worship, observance, practice or teaching.
- Parents and legal guardians shall have the liberty to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.
- A person may not have his rights restricted in any way, or be granted any privileges, on the basis of his or her sex, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, religion, convictions, or opinions.
- State and local government establishments of teaching and education shall be secular. At the request of parents, they shall offer classes in religious instruction
- The State shall recognize traditional Lithuanian churches and religious organizations, as well as other churches and religious organizations provided that they have a basis in society and their teaching and rituals do not contradict morality or the law.
- Churches and religious organizations shall freely proclaim the teaching of their faith, perform the rituals of their belief, and have houses of prayer, charity institutions, and educational institutions for the training of priests of their faith.

From relevant constitutional points mentioned above, it is clear that religious education would only be provided if it is requested and recognized religious organizations can take part. Sunni Islam is one of the state-recognized 9 traditional religions which have presence in country for more than 300 years. Accordingly, Muslim community can provide religious education in schools, if requested by parents.

ALTERNATE TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The optional lessons of ethics are provided for those pupils who refuse attending lessons of religion. The optional program of religion or ethics for all Lithuanian schools was confirmed by the Ministry of Education and the Church institutions in 1994. According to the latest amendment of the Law on Education (2003, June 28) the students choose between ethics and religion. Under the age of 14 the parents have right to choose for their schoolchildren under 14. Nearly half of Lithuanian school students choose religion as optional subject.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Muslims in Lithuania are a very small minority and though the provision for education on religion of choice is there, adequate information or research about current status of Islamic education in schools could not be found.

FUNDING:

“The number of wholly private religious schools is relatively small. There are 30 schools with ties to Catholic or Jewish groups, although students of different religious groups often attend these schools. All accredited private schools (religious and nonreligious) receive funding from the Ministry of Education and Science through a voucher system based on the number of pupils. This system covers only the program costs of school operation. Founders generally bear responsibility for covering capital outlays; however, the ministry funds capital costs of traditional religious private schools where there is an international agreement to do so. To date, the Catholic Church is the only religious group with such an international agreement “.

ICELAND

Following information is found out through 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT (US Department of State, 2013a) and other relevant literature:

In Iceland, Lutheran church serves as state church and receives many benefits which other religious organizations do not have though other officially recognized religious organizations also receive some government funding.

ALMOST ENTIRELY PUBLIC SCHOOLING:

In Iceland, almost all schools are public schools.

INSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

School grades 1-10 (ages 6-15) are required by law to include instruction in Christianity, ethics, and theology. The law also mandates that general teaching practices be shaped by “the Christian heritage of Icelandic culture, equality, responsibility, concern, tolerance, and respect for human value.” The compulsory curriculum for Christianity, ethics, and theology encourages an ‘overview’ of other beliefs as well.

However, according to (Gunnarsson, 2006), 16 years of cases review suggest direct indoctrination.

In secondary schools, theology continues to be taught under the rubric of “community studies” along with sociology, philosophy, and history.

EXEMPTION FROM RELIGIOUS STUDY

The law provides the minister of education with the authority to exempt pupils from instruction in compulsory subjects such as Christianity, ethics, and theology. In practice individual school authorities issue exemptions informally.

ALTERNATE TO RE:

There is no obligation for school authorities to offer other religious or secular instruction in place of these classes. Some observers have noted that this discourages students or their parents from requesting such exemptions and may isolate students who seek exemptions or put them at risk of bullying in schools.

REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO RE:

According to rules, if students have to attend a religious gathering, it would be under supervision of a teacher and without an active involvement from students.

CONTROVERSIES REGARDING INDOCTRINATION IN SCHOOLS:

However, the towns of Alftanes and Mosfellsbaer, in cooperation with the state church, continued to run a pastoral care program for students under which a pastor comes to the classroom and provides guidance on a variety of subjects. The Ethical Humanist Association, Siðmennt, and representatives of non-state religious organizations continued their public criticism of the program’s use in public schools, claiming that the pastoral care program contained aspects of religious indoctrination.

According to Siðmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association (Knútsson, 2011):

“State church priests and deacons, with some exceptions and varying intensity, come into public nursery and primary school classrooms and indoctrinate children. It is often done without parental knowledge or permission or under the pretense that it is not indoctrination. School children are taken to churches and participate in religious rituals. Children in some classrooms participate in public prayers. The representatives of the Gideon Association come into classrooms and distribute bibles to all children, whether they are Christian or not and in some instances conduct public prayers. Children often participate in religious plays. All of these activities are defined by international human rights organizations as religious indoctrination”.

STATE FUNDING:

All state schools are fully funded. In the very small number of private schools, students only pay enrolment fees. Housing and teacher salaries are provided by state (Arnett, 2007, p. 435).

ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:

There is no known Islamic school in Iceland however there are two Islamic organizations which are involved in informal education.

MALTA:

In the scholastic year 2008-2009, 11.9% of the student population attended independent schools, compared to 61.4% at state schools and 26.7% at church schools (Cutajar, 2010). Government contributes 15% of private schooling cost. Muslim population in Malta was estimated to be only 6000 in 2013 ("Maltese perceptions of Muslims," 2013). Catholic education is a part and parcel of public schools however those who do not want to attend it, can skip (Gatt, 2006; J. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2014b). There are two known full-time Islamic schools in Malta. One of them teaches Maltese curriculum with added Islamic studies courses. This school receives some government funding. Number of students in this school are on the increase (Ameen, 2013; James, 2013). The other school, commonly referred to as 'Arabic school' receives no government's funding, unlike Catholic schools, despite excellent administrative records (EPASI, 2008). This school teaches Libyan curriculum.

CONCLUSION:

In this book we have reviewed status of European countries with significant Muslim population in terms of their educational policies and place of Islamic Education in public and private schooling sector. Presented facts highlight the importance and urgency of effective leadership development to benefit not only the educational sector but all facets of our lives.

I end with this beautiful verse from Quran:

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."
(Surah Ar-Rad)

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